

'Love Means Discipline'

Occasionally our readers phone us about hearing a sermon in their parish church which they believe deserves a wider audience. We request the text from the preacher and consider it for printing whenever space permits. The following homily, preached at St. Ambrose Church recently by Father Gerard J. Gull, assistant pastor, speaks of the delinquency of parents.—The Editor.

A 16-year old girl was gabbing on the telephone with a teenage friend. Suddenly a frantic voice broke into the party-line conversation, "Please!" the woman said, "let me use the telephone. This is an emergency!" Snapping her bubble gum, the 16-year old refused to free the line.

The woman, a mother whose three small sons had just fallen from a raft in the middle of a farm pond, begged and wept. "The boys are little," she pleaded, "and they can't swim!"

But the girl couldn't care less — and went right on talking to her friend about the Jefferson Airplane and suchlike things.

In anguish because she could not use the phone, the desperate mother ran back to the pond, wading in as far as she dared, and screaming. By this time none of her boys was visible. Hysterical, she was at last able to attract help by running down the road.

The boys were taken from the water, but it was too late to revive them. Her three sons had drowned—possibly because of a gum-snapping teenager with a heart of stone.

Incredible? No. This happened three weeks ago, here in the United States of America.

Now we are all aware that we have today youngsters who are very admirable: intelligent and informed, sensitive to the problems of our times, generous and even self-sacrificing in a sincere desire to shape the world into a better place.

But we are also aware that we have today in alarming abundance youngsters who, for all their wealth of information and opportunity, are callous and ignorant, unappreciative of advantages given them, selfish and even cruel to others in an

overriding desire to do their own thing.

More and more people are asking: why?

Granted: the turmoil of our times leads to a certain moral confusion. Granted: materialism, overstressed in America, inclines toward false goals.

But in both of these we adults are at fault. On the one hand, for surrendering our moral judgment when it becomes difficult; and on the other hand, for chasing after the mirage of "total comfort" as though that were the ideal for living. In so doing we have not only failed to guide our children: we have become contemptible in their eyes by turning to them for leadership.

The inevitable reason, therefore, for the deplorable degree of juvenile failure and delinquency is: the delinquency of parents and their failure to assume parental responsibilities.

Giving our children an exaggerated importance, we have put them in a burdensome position which they cannot psychologically maintain. The reaction is: insolence, arrogance, hopelessness, and crime.

The solution at this stage will mean effort at many levels. But the parents and the home are absolutely and essentially basic. Without attempting to make light of the difficulties, may I offer to you who are parents, three quotations of inestimable value?

The first quotation is from a marvelous 90-year old lady whom I used to visit. She said to me once: "WE BEGIN TO TEACH A CHILD COURTESY AT THE BREAST!"

The second quotation is from the Bible, chapter 30 verse 8 of Ecclesiasticus. GIVE YOUR SON HIS WAY, it says, AND HE SHALL MAKE YOU AFRAID; PLAY WITH HIM AND HE SHALL MAKE YOU SORROWFUL. Parents who fear their child have, to that extent, already lost that child. The third quotation is from St. John Bosco, founder of the Salesians and of many Boys' towns. "WHAT A BOY NEEDS IN HIS FATHER," he said, "IS NOT A PAL — BUT AN ANCHOR, A STEADY AND WORTH WHILE MAN TO HANG ON TO."

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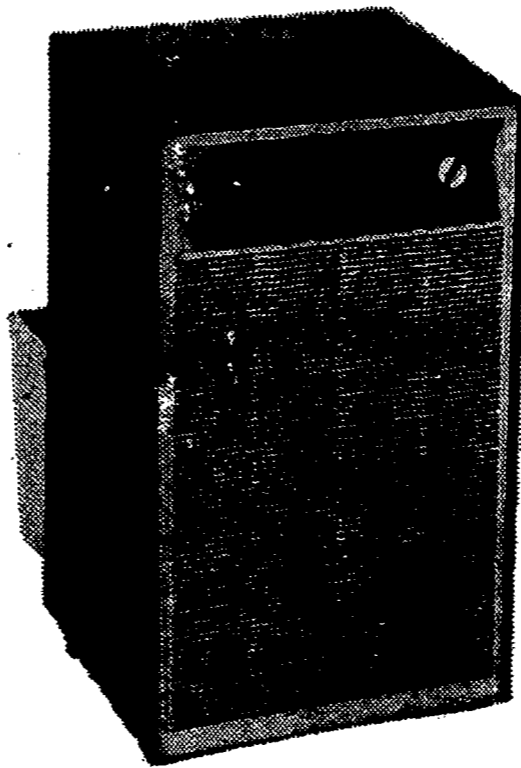
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