

Reflections

Father Nicolas Schwizer

117 October 15, 2011

Family Dialogue

1. Today, a great deal is said about dialogue in all circles of life. But that does not mean to say that there is a great deal of dialoguing, because to talk is easy, to teach is easy, but to dialogue is difficult. Also, in the family, true dialogue is rare. This is also true in families where it appears that everything is OK, where nobody ever raises his/her voice.

2. What counts and what is necessary is true dialogue. A sort of tolerance related to the children's points of view is not dialogue. Putting oneself in their place – as an understanding friend – is still not dialogue. Dialogue assumes a profound inner attitude, the virtue of humility. Not believing that one is the holder of all truth, perfect, unchanging, but knowing the limits, the need to improve, to change.....this humility is the assumption for dialogue.

3. What occurs is that authentic dialogue takes place between truthful persons, and it belongs to humility to recognize the other person, also the child as a truthful person. It is smaller, weaker, less prepared for life, but a person.....an original person, aware, capable of assuming the responsibility for its own decisions. Dialogue is a mysterious bridge between free persons: not necessarily of the same age, with the same preparation, not necessarily the same; but definitely necessarily aware and free.

True dialogue does not exclude the authority which one may have over the other person. On the other hand, it excludes whatever form of contempt, lack of self-esteem or respect, of paternalism (fatherliness). The parents who dialogue with their children will see their authority increase. It is the same as God not fearing to lose authority for dialoguing with mankind; He even became man in order to facilitate dialogue.

4. To dialogue means to talk, but also to listen. Dialogue between parents and children is difficult because there are parents – and sometimes also children – who do not know how to listen. On the one hand, it is a problem of the times: the mother, at times, finds herself absorbed with household chores which are certainly very important

But it is not less important to listen to the child when he/she comes home from school. It is true that the father has much to do, but the father should always have time for what is more important; and for a father, there is nothing more important than to attend to, take care of and educate the child.

It could be said that the parents are disposed to listen, but that the children are not disposed to talking. But, fundamentally, whose fault is it? Perhaps the children tried and they were not given sufficient attention. So, they have become silent. Their sensitivity in relation to the attention from their parents is enormous, it can even seem exaggerated.

What the youth has to say is very important to him/her. He/she has thought it and re-thought it over and over and has even suffered through it. And if he/she does not find at home who will want to listen to him/her, he/she will seek attention – more or less real – outside of the home.

5. To know how to listen – more than a problem of time – is a fact regarding attention and inner readiness (availability). Therefore, it is so difficult. It is about having in oneself some space for the other person and for what they have to say. It is about not being full of oneself and having space for others. If we do not know how to listen to the other person with joyful love, he/she will know it and will not speak again.

True dialogue presupposes attention: attention to the lives of the children, to their words, to their problems. Therefore, to love the children, it is indispensable to know how to look at them. It has to do with an attentive gaze where the soul can empty itself of self in order to be able to receive the person being contemplated.....as he/she is.....in all their truth and richness.

6. Dear brothers and sisters, let us ask the Blessed Virgin to grant us – to our parents and to our children – the grace of fruitful and permanent family dialogue, and that thus our families can grow daily in more love, in surrender and in mutual understanding.

Questions for reflection

1. Do I pay enough attention when the other one is speaking?
2. Do I help the children with their homework?
3. Do I place my efforts for the education of my children into the hands of God?

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Translation: Carlos Cantú, Schoenstatt Family Federation, La Feria, Texas USA 07252011
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