

## Train up a Child in the Way He Should Go

by Fr. Andrew Moore

*"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it."*

Before offering a brief homily on this beloved passage of Holy Scripture, I ask you to consider two statements which came to mind during my preparation.

When I was growing up in South Alabama, often a child became unruly or a teenager behaved quite badly especially in public. Someone would shout, "Who raised that child?" The reply came quickly, "Aw, he wasn't raised —he just grew up!"

Recently, I overheard a young mother speaking to her belligerent, disobedient toddler, "Honey, I would never make you do anything you don't want to do."

*"Train up a child in the way he should go ..."*

How vitally important is this godly counsel in our contemporary world — especially for Orthodox Christians.

This passage assumes there is a way in which a child should go. He may not want to go that way. Others (peers, playmates, friends or enemies) may not want him to go that way. Circumstances may not be such that he finds it convenient to go that way. But there is a way — there is a way — there is a way. Those of us who are charged with the care of these children — parents, priests, teachers, godparents — must see to it that they find that way and are trained to live in that way.

Training is not always easy, seldom comfortable, rarely fun and often painful. The Hebrew term here means to make narrow or to constrict. Motivation, instruction and discipline are elements of training. While it is hard, training is never abusive nor hateful. The child is not demeaned or belittled. The goal of training is health, not harm; it is to save, not to slay.

*"Train up a child in the way he should go ..."*

The Holy Prophet Isaiah spoke of this when he said, "Though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction your ears shall hear a word behind you saying, 'This is the way, walk in it'" (Is. 30:20).

Jesus called the first disciples to that way when He cried, "Follow Me ..." (Matt. 4:19). In the midst of that blessed journey, He challenged those spiritual children, "Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Me" (Matt. 16:24). He was training, He was leading, He was guiding them in that ever-narrowing way. Near the end, his words surely pierced their souls: "You will indeed drink My cup and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with" (Matt. 20:22). No, it was not easy. It was the way of agony, suffering, rejection and even death; but it was the way — the narrow way — the only way that leads to life. Jesus loved them too much to let them go another way.

At his encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus, St. Paul also found that way with pain. The voice came from heaven: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goals" (Acts 26:14). But as he walked in that way and responded to the intense training at the hands of the Lord, St. Paul began to see the plan and purpose of it all. Some years later, in a letter to his children in Corinth, the blessed Apostle wrote, "... for the love of Christ compels me ..." (II Cor. 5:14). To the churches of Galatia he testified, "the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

*"Train up a child in the way he should go ..." because we love our children so much.*

Few, if any, moments in my life are more etched in my memory than the morning of February 22, 1987. My forehead was pressed against the Holy Altar at St. Ignatius Church in Franklin, Tennessee. Saidna PHILIP's hand lay heavy on the back of my head. I didn't know then what I know now about that service, but in that holy moment I became a child and he became my father. I knew somehow that I was being called to a way. It was no longer my way but his (my bishop's) way. My brothers and sisters, there is surely a way given to us — the Orthodox Way, the way of the Apostles, the way of the Fathers, the way of the Martyrs, the way of the Ascetics, the way of the Church, the way of the Creed, the way of the Canons. It was the way in which I must now go; indeed the way for all of us. There is no other. No matter what the cost, the pain, the disappointments, the heartaches ... it was the way I should go and my beloved bishop would train me up in that way and I would follow. Thanks be to God!

My dear wife Dannie and I have been abundantly blessed with six wonderful children. We have not done everything we should as parents and what we have done has been imperfect at best. However, we have loved them deeply and, above all else, we yearn for them to love and serve God. Training them to that end has been a lifelong effort with laughter and tears, joy and sorrow, fun and frustration, winning and losing. But in the doing of it all, one thing was clear — we must save them whatever the cost. Our love for them must go deeper than the lure of popularity, the "in thing", the "everybody's doing it" and all the rest.

Let me share with you an incident which summarizes these thoughts. Some years ago, our parish held a retreat in the North Georgia mountains. Late one afternoon, a terrifying scream from across the lake broke the quietness of the day's end. As we rushed toward the lakeside, our son, John, ran to us amid tears and gasps of pain. A young friend's fishing lure had found its way into John's hand and the treble hook was buried deep in the flesh. Somehow, in the midst of the prayers, fears, confusion and distress I heard a voice — you know, that heavenly word. "If you are going to help him, you are going to have to hurt him." Quietly I said to John, "Son, trust me, I'm going to hurt you because I want to help you." Taking hold of that hook, I pushed it even deeper into his hand. I knew it was so painful but he stood there. Trusting me through the tears he stood there. Then, with a slight turn, that hook just came right out! Words will never be able to describe how it felt when we carried John across the field to the cottage. He was quiet, arms around my neck, and asleep when we got back. He had been hurt but now he was healed.

Train up a child in the way he should go — whatever the cost.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.