

# Opportunities for Instruction

*The last chapter dealt with formal instruction - school-based, parish-based, home-based. But side by side with this, there are many opportunities in daily family life for Grandparents to spell out the Christian story to their Grandchildren. Some of these are obvious but, for the sake of completeness, they deserve a mention. A simple example is grace before (and after) meals. Unfortunately, this simple and beautiful prayer habit is becoming less common, even in practising Catholic families (perhaps because we have fewer family meals nowadays).*



Grandparents who have abandoned the habit should revive it as part of their new responsibility and be careful to observe it diligently when their Grandchildren are present. It is bound to arouse their curiosity, especially if not practised at home, and could prompt a useful chat about God, providence and fatherhood - even, indeed, about prayer in general, especially night and morning prayer. (After all, children need to be taught how to pray and it is disturbing to think that many

children must be growing-up nowadays without knowing what prayer is.

A sincere and well-executed Sign of the Cross will greatly add to the effectiveness of grace before/after meals (and perhaps on other appropriate occasions). Children often see this magnificent Christian gesture used, for example, on television by athletes from Catholic countries. They will be all the more ready to listen to a short explanation of its origin and meaning. Reference has already been made to the various

symbols and devotional objects which children might see around their Grandparents house, if not around their own - crucifix, statues, pictures, etc. - all arousing interest and curiosity and perhaps being the cue for explanation and enlightenment. But, besides these daily opportunities, there are others which we might call seasonal; the great Christian festivals which still have some religious overtones in the minds of most people, though nowadays in many households they tend to be celebrated in a completely secular manner.

Of these, the first place, of course, must go to Christmas - if not, perhaps, in the eyes of the Church, certainly in the eyes of most Western peoples and most certainly in the eyes of our Grandchildren. And it offers golden opportunities in our task as Faith transmitters. Starting with Advent, Grandparents should try to get hold of a religious Advent calendar, highlighting the prophets, the Annunciation and the Visitation. The Grandchildren, during their visits,



should be encouraged to open up the pages for the next few days, which will almost always prompt a few words of explanation. Likewise, the children, when present, should take part in lighting the Advent candles (nowadays making a come-back in many places).

A largish Crib is advisable, one which takes a lot of assembling (done by the Grandchildren if possible)

with a few extras - cottonwool snow outside and straw inside, and with the Wise Men added at the Epiphany, combined possibly with the school Nativity play. All this should bring the Bible story to life.

Taking the year chronologically, the next great Christian season is Lent, still a meaningful work in the English language



and still vaguely associated by most people with self-denial. Many Grandparents will recall from their own childhood days, the fascination which this rather grim season had for Catholic children, and the almost competitive spirit in which they gave things up, especially when this was geared to helping the less fortunate. If anything, the worldwide victims of hunger and disease figure even more prominently in our newspapers and on our television screens today and it shouldn't be too difficult to link their need with our plenty, especially during this season.

Towards the end of Lent, Palm Sunday provides a rich opportunity to discuss with the children the dramatic events of Holy Week. If the children have not themselves received palm crosses at Church, Grandparents should ensure that their own are prominently displayed when Grandchildren visit. The entry into Jerusalem, the arrest, and the crucifixion itself are implied in these simple but ancient symbols. Grandparents will doubtless notice other echoes from the past which interest the youngsters. Great Feast Days are worth a mention, especially biblical ones, like those of Jesus himself and his Mother. If the children themselves have Saints'



names, a joint search could be made for their own feast days and possibly a little celebration might mark each one.

But in all this, Grandparents will beware of being carried away by enthusiasm. That's where the art of grandparenting comes in.

Discretion. Knowing when the time is ripe. Knowing when it's not. Knowing when to hold back. Letting it be clearly seen that we simply want to help both our Grandchildren and their parents. Remembering always that progress in our great task is possible only when all three - parents, Grandparents and children - are working together in harmony.