

2012

Synod Theme: “Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward” Psalm 127:3.

God values children so highly that children in this Bible passage are regarded as an heritage from the Lord. Children represent the essence of discipleship which is coming to Jesus in humility and receiving His blessing. In the gospel of St. Mark 10:13-16. Jesus was displeased with the disciples because they rebuked the parents for bringing children to Him. He said “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like little child will never enter it.” (Mk.10:14&15). Psalm 8:2 says, “Out of the mouth of babes and suckling hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou might still the enemy and the avenger.” In Psalm 127, the Bible regards children as of great value by referring to them in verse 4 as arrows in the hands of the warrior. No wonder Jesus took each child into His arms, placed His hands on their heads and blessed them. It was Jesus great pleasure to spend time with little children.

Too often, children are seen as liabilities rather than assets. But the Bible calls children “an heritage from the Lord” a reward. We can learn valuable lessons from their inquisitive minds and trusting spirits. Those who view children as a distraction or nuisance should instead see them as an opportunity to shape the future. Jesus’ word in Mark 10:13-16 is asking all people to accept them, and learn from them because children exhibit open mindedness and genuineness in their behaviour and complete trust.

Parenting: Psalm 11 verse 3 says, “When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do.” Children are the hope of parents. Children today are the youth of tomorrow and youths today are the adult of tomorrow. Hence children are the foundation of the nation and of individual adult. The importance of laying a solid foundation for a building cannot be overemphasized. The architect and engineers valued the

foundation of any structure very much. Hence, they devote careful attention to the aspect. Many houses that were reported to have collapsed in the recent times in Lagos and Abuja and other places happened as a result of shoddy foundations.

The future of a nation lies in the solid foundation of the children. If a nation is found to be corrupt and full of evil things done by the youth and adult like we are experiencing in Nigeria today, then, we must know that our foundation was not well laid. Psychology tells us that “the child is the father of an adult” that is, whatever you adopt as habit from the childhood will dictate the type of life you will live throughout your life span.

We cannot overstress the importance of parenting if we want to transform our society and our nation. Children mimic their parents. Children are enlargement of the films of parents. Whatever we discover in our national life as evil, like corruption, Boko Haram, kidnapping, armed robbers, wickedness, prostitution, money laundering, etc are products of homes. What good children shall one expect from broken homes? Unwanted pregnancy which brings up unwanted or abandon children. Children that have only the care of a single parent or have no care of any parent. The evils that pervade our national life today are products of parents’ neglect to value children as God commanded.

In the early 1950s up to 1970s, all people in a community in our nation were responsible for the upbringing of children. Then, people cared about what happened to their neighbour. Then, people have peace of mind. They lived longer and they enjoyed the environment where God placed them. Then, people in our country believed in uprightness and they also valued family names. This was the result of joint responsibility of parents and the community in the upbringing of children. The reason was because every adult then behaved as parents. There was respect for elders and there was a family value. The adage that “charity begins at home” has a central place in the community and national life.

Our experience today is contrary to the above. The reason is the fact that every individual is living his or her own life. We now have youths giving birth to children. Youths of between 13 to 17 years old, most children born by these youths come as a result of fornication and most children do not have responsible parenthood. Most youths today rush into marriage without believing in marriage and within a short time they will rush out of it. Hence, cases of divorce are many in Customary, Magistrate and High Courts in Nigeria.

It is worthwhile to say that before anybody gets into marriage relationship, that person must believe in marriage. Marriage itself is accepting high sense of responsibility to care and love the spouse. This is the beginning of building up a responsible parenting. We become apprentices in order to learn an art. It is our appeal to our government to include Sex-education and parenting in the curriculum of our secondary school nationwide. This will serve as foundation for reformation in our nation. The reason is that our culture believes much in the fact that every marriageable youth must marry. Every parent looks forward to a day he/she will give a daughter in marriage or will see his/her son married. Since marriage is essential flavour in our culture Sex-education and Parenting should be made compulsory subjects at our secondary School levels.

Training: The Bible says, “train a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not turn from it”(Proverbs 22:6). Home training is very important in the upbringing of children. We are supposed to nurture our children in the way of the Lord. For us Christians we must build up our children that they become like God. Since children are an heritage from the Lord. We are to make sure that spiritual nurturing is of paramount importance. We have to give our children spiritual food as well as physical food. Our family altar must be alive and active. Morning and evening gathering for meditation in the Bible and prayer must be our routine. One of the Sunday school lyrics says “Read your Bible, pray everyday, ... if you want to grow”. In addition to this, we are to train our children how (a) to greet and respect parents and elders by example. (b) sweeping the house and environment daily – Daily routine. (c) preparing

food. They must learn how to cook and we must not open their eyes to Mr. Biggs, Tantalizers etc. (d) care of their body, teeth, nails, hairs – they must love to do this when we train by example. (e) washing and ironing their clothes. (f) industry: we must teach them to till the ground, do little farming and learning a trade, making baskets, kneading, making brooms, etc. The letter to Titus reads:

But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine: that the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience. The aged women likewise, that they be in behavior as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; that they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed. Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded. In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you. Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things; not answering again... (Titus 2:1-9).

As parents we must teach by example.

We are to follow the example of people of faith in the Bible as Paul told us of Timothy thus:

When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also. Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God,

which is in thee by the putting on of my hands...(2 Timothy 1:5-6).

The faith transferred from grandmother Lois and to mother Eunice and now in Timothy. What an heritage?

Examples abound in the Bible. We see that Samuel was nurtured by Eli and Elisha was nurtured by Elijah, etc. Jesus was nurtured by Joseph and Mary (Lk.2:21-52. In verse 52, we read "And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and men".

The preoccupation of parents in the formative years of children i.e. age 1-12 is the parenting. Bringing up the children in the fear of God. In a nation where the care of children is left in the hands of housemaids, the result is the stories of woes we see day-in-day-out in our nation. Mothers should stay with children in these formative years so that fathers should accept responsibility of providing for the mothers and children these years. I opine that mothers should work when the children have completed their formative years. We need godly parents to bring up God fearing children for the transformation of our community. In fact, the child is the centre of the family, community and the nation. Serious attention must be given to child's training.

Case study

Proverbs 4:1 – 7

Hear, O sons, a father's instruction, and be attentive, that you may gain insight; for I give you good precepts: do not forsake my teaching. When I was a son with my father, tender, the only one in the sight of my mother, he taught me, and said to me, "Let your heart hold fast my words; keep my commandments, and live; do not forget, and do not turn away from

the words of my mouth. Get wisdom; get insight. Do not forsake her, and she will keep you; love her, and she will guard you. The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, and whatever you get, get insight.

The Native Americans of Michigan were the state's first highway route engineers. With few exceptions, Michigan's major highways follow the trails they cut through the wilderness hundreds of years before the white man came. A trail was 12-18 inches wide, and for safety the people followed single file. Then pack horses followed these trails, widening them. Later, came wagons, and the trails became dirt roads and then highways.

In a similar way, Solomon followed the trail of his father and in turn paved the way for his sons and grandsons. He did this by encouraging his sons to heed his instructions just as he had followed the sound teaching of his father (Prov.4:4-5). So, this father, giving his sons good practical and spiritual counsel, was passing on what he had learned from the boys' grandfather, David, who was called a "man after [God's] own heart" (1 Sam.13:14; Acts 13:22). The younger generation of believers often learns best about God from the family.

Our physical and spiritual children watch the path we're taking. As God's men and women, let's make certain we cut a righteous, wise, and clear trail. Then if ongoing generations choose to follow, the trail can become a highway – an ongoing legacy to God's glory. – Dave Egner

*Lord, as I walk my path of life,
Help my feet step straight and true;
That those who follow after me,
Will be tracking straight with You. – Egner.*

When we follow God, we blaze a trail for those who would follow.

from Our Daily Bread

April 24, 2012.

Education: We know that in formal education, the child is the centre. The motives and purposes of education are to bring the children up in order to know how to react to many issues of life. To be current with the development in the world. To have a focus in the chosen career and to be able to manage and develop his environment. The Bible says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (Proverbs 1:7). The basic things teachers must impart to the children is the fear of the Lord. Education without the fear of the Lord will lead to chaos in the world. We gain a lot of wisdom when we have the fear of the Lord. Further, the Bible says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Ps.111:10a).

The missionary came to Nigeria in 1842 bringing with them the gospel, establishing schools and hospitals. In the various schools established by the missionary and as handed over to the generation after them, religious knowledge was given prominence. It was the first subject every morning in the then mission schools. It was a compulsory subject. Children were introduced to the Catechism. Watt Catechism was rehearsed from Primary 1 to 3 and Church Catechism from Primary 4 to Primary 6. Attention was given to teachers. All teachers then, went to Teacher Training Colleges which abound all over our country then. They saw the need to train teachers the art of teaching. Then, they were sent out to teach our children. The result was the peaceful atmosphere enjoyed by our community and country then. Teachers then, had knowledge in every area of human endeavours. They taught about 8 subjects daily. They devoted their lives to teaching and were happy at their works. They were highly respected in our community.

The experience today is different; there is no more Teachers' Training Colleges in our country. Our government played down the teaching of religious studies and other subjects like social studies, history, and of course our language Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo. In the above, we learn about our past and folklore. The rich cultures of our land were becoming

history. The children then, knew from childhood that elderly parents and teachers deserve respect, care and reverence.

The tide turned in the late 1960s when the military took over the government. The government then played down prayer and teaching of religious knowledge at school in the name of secularism. Corruption, greed, thurgry, avarice, armed robbery, kidnapping and terrorism which we experience today in our nation are the outcome of the play down of religious knowledge and the facing out of Teachers' Training Colleges in our country. Teaching which used to be a noble profession became anathema to our generation. It is time for our government and the church to return to the ancient paths. The type of education we give our children today is counter productive. We spoon feed them from infant to young adult. We take them to nursery school as early as age 6 months at 7.00a.m and leave them in the hands of housemaids when they are back from school around 5.00p.m. When they start Primary School they go in the morning as early as 7.00a.m. We encourage lesson after school and have them back at about 5.00p.m daily. They make no contributions to homes. It was not so in our days. In those days every child had duties to perform at home before school resumed at 8.00a.m and after school at 2.00p.m.; some of us would go and help our parents in the farms. The results today are that our children are lazy. They are not articulate. Most of them, ladies, that are married do not know how to cook. My charge for the government and the governed today is the call of Jeremiah in chapter 6:16 I quote, "This is what the Lord says; '***Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good road is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls***'.

Society and Environment roles: In the culture of Yoruba people, the upbringing and nurture of children are the responsibilities of the society and the immediate community. The Yoruba lived a communal life before civilization. Each family and dynasty lived together and every other dynasty in a particular community knew each other. Hence, the joy of a member of the community was the joy of all people living in that community be it a village or town. The sorrow of a member of the

community or a dynasty was the sorrow of all members of that society, village or town. The Yorubas lived a communal life where everybody knew the other even by name.

One other thing that the Yoruba of old was noted for was the fact that they cared for one another. It was a common saying that a family gave birth to a child but the whole society joined together to instill the society value and training into the child. Hence, we can say that, in the Yoruba race, we were good brothers' keeper.

The society provided the conducive environment where the child grew up. The atmosphere was that of peace devoid of all wickedness that bedevil our society today, like, house breaking, armed robbers, kidnappers and the recent terrorism. Children need conducive environment in order to grow in the grace of our Lord. The adage, like fathers like sons, like priest like the congregation' having bearing on the building up the society. We need to revert back to this good heritage. If all members of our nation have moral values, if all members of our nation care for others, if we consider other people as valuable, our nation will be free of embezzlement, money laundering and exploitation. The regret, many families that struggled to bring their children up in the way of the Lord today comes from the fact that the corrupt society and the pollution of environment negate the same. Most children that came from good homes are launched into the society already polluted with bribery, corruption and immoral practices. We need in our time to launch the rebirth of our nation by deliberately starting a new agenda of training for our children. Adult needs rebirth by creating a good environment and societal values for these children who are heritages of the Lord.

Roles of the Government: The government at the national, states and local levels need to have a new orientation if in truth we are serious with the transformation of our generation. The government must take a giant step, and also make a deliberate attempt to be a people oriented government. For now our government at all levels does not care for the people at the grass-root. They only use them, induce them, and exploit them to win

election. When an average Nigerian got elected into any position in our government, he forgets his immediate constituency. What we realize daily is that every political party who won at any state behave as if that party and all the post in the government belong to them. The provision of security, electricity, pipe borne water, good roads, health, education and employment for the community become secondary to self-serving government. In the civilized countries all over the world the above are natural responsibilities of the government. In a place where the above basic needs are attended to, children grow up to appreciate their environment. Our government in the national, state and local levels must address the provisions of basic need of people and see the same as their primary duty.

No government in this nation should believe and behave in winners take it all. If we do, we create the impression to our children that this is the way to live. Leadership is contagious, like leaders like people. The nation Nigeria must rise up to the responsibility of bringing that rebirth we long for by operating a people oriented government. We must do this if in truth we are operating a democratic government. We must do this if the dividends of the democratic government will reach every member of our nation. We must do this if we believe in truth that democracy is the government of the people, by the people and for the people. Many people in this nation, about 80% of the people of our nation have not benefited from our hard earned democracy. We must realize that if we have to build our nation up, we must do so by personal example and sacrifice. Then, we shall leave a legacy of moral values for our children who must take over the governance of this nation from us. Thus, we need servant leadership and leadership by example. Example the adage says is better than precepts.

The Role of the Church: Christians today must live out the faith. It is our responsibility to demonstrate to our generation that we are there to build up people of our generation in the way of the Lord. The church must behave like the Antioch church. In Acts 11:25 to 26, we have this; “Then

Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch”.

Christians are people who are Christ like. They are little Christs in the world. The church of God where Christians operate is the body and bride of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ described Christians as salt and light of the world (Matt.5:13-16). In verse 16, Jesus said “In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven”. In fact, Jesus Christ said in John 14:12, thus “I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in Me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.” It is not enough for Christian to proclaim the gospel; we must live it out to this generation. We are to talk the talk, and work the work of God, by walking in the way of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Thus, effective parenting is the key towards eradicating corruption in Nigeria. Many parents are not responsible to the training of their children. Most children in our country do not know their parents. Imagine parents who will get out of home around 4.00a.m everyday and return at 11.00p.m. The upbringing of children are left in the hands of housemaids who are ignorant, or day care centres who are out to make money. Hence, most children do not have respect for constituted authority. Every person wants to do what he/she likes. Hence, the structure of federal character has been marginalized.

The church today should encourage the revival of Boys/Girls’ Brigade, Boys scout, Boys/Girls’ Guild in order to raise the moral of the society. Christian politicians are supposed to be salt and light in their various political parties. However, there is a lot of difference between a Christian and church goers. Most Christians in politics who do not see anything wrong in the art of governance today are mere church goers. We need to take morality to our politics today. It is the responsibility of the church to bring the people up spiritually.

The church must stand as advocacy for revival of Teachers' Training Colleges. The church also must stand as advocacy for teaching our children our rich culture, religious knowledge, our history, tradition, our language and folklore. We must insist on proper counseling before marriage. We should advocate for parents to live together. The situation where the husband works in Abuja and the wife works in Lagos or the wife works in London or US and the husband works in Lagos would not give the children the opportunity of knowing how family lives together. Home training must be jointly done by both parents.

It is through training and discipline that we build up character. I like to quote from Hebrews 12:4ff:

In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not discipline by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone under-goes discipline) then you are illegitimate children and not true sons... No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Hence, we need to build up good character in our children. We need to do this as a church by our conduct and examples.

In the thought for the day on February 22, 2012. I curled this write up:

"When wealth is lost
nothing is lost
when health is lost
something is lost

when character is lost
everything is lost”

Today as a church and in this Diocese, we need effective children evangelism. We need to deliberately indoctrinate our children, nurturing them in Watt Catechism, Church Catechism, home training and education with revised curriculum for character building. Our children must be trained to have value for lives and their hands trained and engaged in gainful self employment. Thus, we must watch the type of character we build up in them, the type of information technology and television we exposed them to. Here parents and children service teachers have very important roles to play, in the area of commitment, moral discipline, unity of purpose, at home, in the church and in our national life. This is a very important investment which the church must pursue to justify our claim to pragmatic evangelism.

Conclusion: Parents, society, Christians and people at the helm of affairs in our Nation must take responsibility for the decay in morals, upbringing of children, decay in education set up, where the child is no longer the center as it was, decay in health set up, where the sick is no longer the center and social political set up where integrity, dignity of labour, accountability and probity have been set aside for greed, self serving and love of money where politics has been seen as profession. Whereas, in 1 Tim.6:6-7 Paul said “But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it”.

I appeal to leaders of our nation to be people oriented, and have human face in all spheres of our responsibility to the State. I appeal to parents to be conscious of the fact that they should be home makers and not home breakers. They must be loving and caring, always investing on their children. As builder of the nation, parents have a duty to train children to be of good character in the society. This can only be done by personal example of life of sacrifice. I appeal to the government, especial, in the area of education to revisit training of teachers in Teacher Training Colleges to regain the past glory we had in educational sector when

students and pupils were proud of their teachers. It is then that education will be child centre.

Finally, all of us must understand that we are making a long term investment when we practice what we mention above. We shall reap whatever we sow, as every human being is the architect of his destiny. The Bible says "Do not be deceived; God is not mocked. A man reaps what he sows. (Gal.6:7). The greatest and best investment is to invest good character training in our children.

We have responsibility to acknowledge that children are God's heritage and the fruits of the womb his reward. The way out is to demonstrate to our children by our conduct that they are gifts from God. Since children learn by mimicking parents. Christian parents should live by example in the areas of politics. We must not engage in do or die politics, knowing that politics is not a profession as many people see it today. We must demonstrate to them that we are people of integrity, probity and accountability. Then we shall build a nation of our dream.

Listen to what the Psalmist says in Psalm 128:

Blessed are all who fear the Lord, who walk in his ways, you will eat the fruit of your labour. Blessings and prosperity will be yours, your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your sons will be like olive shoots around your table. Thus, is the man blessed who fears the Lord. May the Lord bless you from Zion all the days of your life. May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem and may you live to see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel. Amen. (Psalm 128:1-end).

Your friend & Bishop.

+ *Olubayo Ilesa.*