



VIVA LA MAMA!!!

A Plug For Mothers

By REGINA C. SY

Last year, on the 25th of June, the streets of Rome were jammed with pilgrims and all directed their way towards St. Peter's Square. Fifty thousand people packed the great Basilica and three hundred thousand crowded the piazza. They came to assist at the canonization of the newest saint, a 12 year-old girl, Maria Teresa Goretti. The girl's mother, now an old frail paralyzed woman, came too, and as she was wheeled into the church, the vast gathering broke out into a mighty cheer: "Viva la Mama"

Maria Teresa Goretti was a poor peasant girl. Her rare beauty and early physical development enkindled an unchaste passion in a farm laborer, a young man of twenty and a member of the Goretti household.

Vainly he tried by every means to seduce the girl. Maddened by her repeated refusals, he threatened to kill her if she dared to breathe a word of what had happened. For 30 days the poor child lived in constant fear of death, but she would not give

in. Her only answer was: "It is a sin; God does not want it."

When the ruffian finally got her in his power and offered her the choice between sin and death, she did not hesitate; she valiantly chose to die. She struggled heroically until at length she sank to the floor, her blood gushing from eight mortal wounds. The stem was broken, but the lily was still beautiful. Maria Teresa was a martyr of purity.

Where did this poor girl, brought up in the vast solitudes of the Italian Compagna, this child who had never been to school, who could neither write, —where had she learned to rise to such sublime heights of virtue? The crowd in St. Peter's shouted the answer: "Viva la Mama!"

Saints are not just born; they are made in homes that rear them. Without a Monica of Tagaste, there would have been no St. Augustine.

Without Queen Blanche of Castile, France would never have been blessed with a regime of justice and charity under a St. Louis the IX. Impulsive

Baby Therese of three would not have blossomed into the Flower of Jesus without the pious Zelig and Luis Martin, and without Asunta Goretti, there would not have been a Sta. Maria Teresa Goretti. After God and her brave little heart, she owed it all to the splendid teachings of her mother.

Asunta Goretti's home was a poor home, but it was a pious home. She had to work hard to feed her orphaned children, but as she worked in the field she prayed and poured her own piety, her own love of God into the souls of her children, and like Blanche of Castile, she inspired them with a horror of sin... yes, she taught her little girl to prefer death rather than to consent to a single mortal sin.

It is true that the business of making saints is fundamentally an affair between the individual soul and God. But the parents have terrible responsibility, the duty to prepare the ground, a fertile field for the good seed to fall on; an atmosphere where the seed can sprout and grow and bear fruit... a pious home where the children learn to live in the love of God.

It is a curious fact, but there are parents who seem to think that young children should not be imbued with religious thought—who think that children should be left to make their own decision when they are old enough to judge whether they will have religion in their lives or not.

These parents do impose their judgment upon their children for what concerns their food and clothing,

their rest and exercise, their schooling, medical care and everything else that tends to their physical-well-being, but they find that the least suggestion of religion should be scrupulously avoided. They seem to think that religion might somehow interfere with their children's living a normal human life, and that to force religion upon them is equal to depriving them of the good things of life. They take as great pains to keep religion out of the children as others do to get religion into them.

When such parents detect religious leanings in their children, especially towards a religious vocation, they are decidedly alarmed. When pressed, they will say that their children are free to choose the religious life, but they must wait until they are mature; they must first get acquainted with the world.

Just what do they mean by that stock phrase; **get acquainted with the world?** What kind of a world is it they should get acquainted with? A good world... or a bad world? Since a religious vocation offers a good world, I suppose they mean a bad one... and this leads to several rather queer conclusions: First let your children become bad, then make them good; first let their souls and bodies become soiled, then cleanse them; first let their tastes become viciated, then change their appetites.

A salesman in a soap-flakes or metal polish may soil an object in the house in order to demonstrate the effectiveness of his cleansing materials. That works, because the

soiled object cannot protest against being made clean, but it is unwise to employ that process with human souls. They can and they do protest against change. A person may get so accustomed to indulging in vulgarity and vice that he chooses to continue to wallow in the mire of sin and shame.

It can never be too early to start the training of the child in piety, in the love of God. Many people underestimate the ability of children to grasp spiritual truths... But why should children not converse with God more easily than grown-ups? Their souls are pure, filled with the Holy Trinity, and the flow of grace is unimpeded.

Children have such simple faith in the efficacy of prayer, that it is easy to teach them the habit to pray — not memorized formulas, but natural little talks with God, such as a "Thank you, Jesus, because you took care of me while I slept... Thank you, Jesus, for my lovely breakfast... Dear Jesus, help Daddy in the office... help Mommy in her work... please Jesus, I was naughty... forgive me..." and so on throughout the day.

If the parents teach their children early to see God in everything around them in the blue of the skies, the white clouds, the rain and sunshine, in the blade of the grass, the tree, the flowers... if they explain to their children the natural mechanical phenomena — the anatomy of rainbows, the hydrologic cycle... how radios work and how children are

born, and if in these explanations they direct the attention of the children to the goodness and wisdom of God who made the world and made it fundamentally good and beautiful, they will inculcate a solid piety and a Christian viewpoint.

If they teach their children early that God loves them and is living right in their souls, they will give a sense of purpose to their lives and a motive for work well done, and suffering accepted. They will establish in their children a pattern of prayer and a habit of piety which will serve them in all the circumstances they will meet in later life.

Serving God will become a joy, not a drudge; sacrifice and self-denial which invariably must be faced in later life, will be met, not with resentment, frustration and neuroses, but with loving resignation and trust in God.

When in later life, misfortune strikes, they will not fall into despair, but they will seek comfort in the arms of a loving God; they will not become suicides, but saints.

You may say, and with reason that all that is easy as long as the children are small, but once they reach high school age, they get beyond the control of the parents. They contrast the pattern by which they were brought up with the cynical values of the "outside" world. They meet other boys and girls; they visit the homes of their friends. They see the advertisements and billboards, they hear the radios... and everything they hear and see shows them

that the rest of their world are enjoying themselves, while they are restricted in a thousand ways by the dictates of religion. They look at their friends with their pockets bulging with money, at their movies, their comics... and they begin to wonder if they are "suckers". Their friends do not go to daily mass... They may see "Neptune's Daughter"... Why are they not allowed... Are they being cheated? Is religion real?... or are the values of the world around them real?

This is a crucial period for children and parents alike. The instinct of the children is to pull them away from the elders... to become emotionally independent... But if their home training until then has been Christian, has been pious, the parents need not be alarmed. The struggle of the adolescent for personal identity will not affect the spiritual pattern their pious home has given them.

But the time has come for the wise

parents to make a frank appeal to their children to embrace the life of grace, and to reject the life of self-seeking. The time has come to show the children the wide chasm that lies between the following of Christ and the following of self...

It is then they should be made to realize that secularism cannot be sanctified and Christianity humanized until they appear the same — they are not the same and the children must choose. It is also then that the penance and prayer and sacrifices of their long years of married life shall bear fruit... The example of the sincere piety and wholesome Christian life of the parents will then do more for the children, than a hundred sermons... The parents have suffered for the souls of their children; they have paid for them; they have bought them with their own pain and sorrow, and when the time shall come, they will pay with their death... They may leave the rest to God!

A WILL ROGERS RETORT

Will Rogers once attended a fashionable Park Avenue affair in a cowboy duds. A dowager (in an extremely low-cut evening gown) looked down her nose.

"My dear man," she sniffed, "don't you have any clothes besides those?"

"Madam," drawled Rogers, "I was just about to ask you the same thing."

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Preparation is nine-tenths of the battle, in war or in business.