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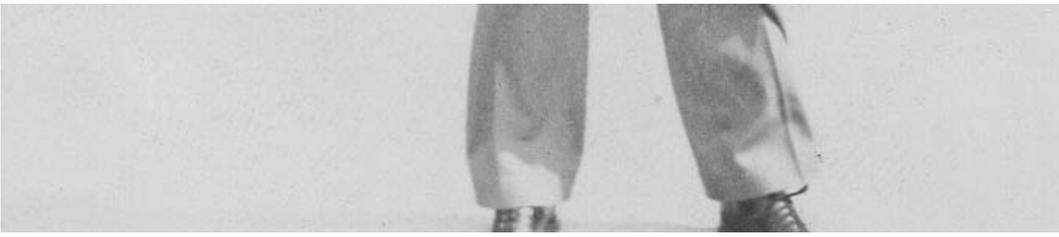
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## THE THREE MUNERA, PART 1: THE FATHER AS PROPHET

July 7, 2014





In the [introduction](#) to this series, I wrote about how each father is entrusted with three duties, or *munera* in Latin, and that these three duties are modeled by Christ himself. While traditionally associated with the ordained priesthood, these duties just as much apply to the fathers of families, who also share in a priestly role, albeit not a sacramental one.

The three *munera* are as follows:

1. **Munus docendi** – The duty to teach, based on Christ’s role as Prophet
2. **Munus sanctificandi** – The duty to sanctify, based on Christ’s role as Priest
3. **Munus regendi** – The duty to shepherd, based on Christ’s role as King

Today, I want to look at the first of these three duties, the *munus docendi*, the duty to teach.

## It starts with Christ

Throughout the Old Testament, God frequently raised up men, called prophets, whose sole mission was to tell the Jewish people the truth. Often, their message was a warning: Repent or face the consequences. At other times, however, God used the prophets to reveal truths about himself, as he did with Moses on Mount Sinai. In essence, these men were fiery teachers appointed by God.

In the New Testament, Jesus Christ is the ultimate prophet. In fact, he is the prophetic teacher that all the other prophets foreshadowed. His mission was to reveal God the Father fully and completely to the Jews, and ultimately to the gentile world.

Jesus describes himself as a prophetic teacher, a revealer of the truth, when he is being questioned by Pilate about his mission: “For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth.” This prophetic role defined Christ’s life and ministry, and like him, we fathers are called to announce and reveal the truth about God to our families.

## The family as a school

When we think of education, we usually associate it with paid educators teaching from textbooks. Religious education, too, takes place at catechism class at our local parish. In other words, we believe education is what someone else does for our children.

But Scripture makes it quite clear that religious education is to take place first and foremost in the home. After delivering the old covenant law, God commands the Jewish people to teach

their children his precepts constantly:

*And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. And you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*

God is commanding families to live his law so faithfully and diligently that the ways of God literally became the atmosphere, the breathed air, if you will, of the home. He is saying that everything, even the most mundane tasks, are to be teaching moments.

Likewise, the Church has always recognized parents as the primary educators of their children. The family is the domestic Church, and parents have the responsibility to create an atmosphere of faith and piety that defines the Catholic home. The Church summarizes this beautifully in the Catechism:

*Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. They bear witness to this responsibility first by creating a home where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and disinterested service are the rule. The home is well suited for education in the virtues. This requires an apprenticeship in self-denial, sound judgment, and self-mastery – the preconditions of all true freedom. Parents should teach their children to subordinate the “material and instinctual dimensions to interior and spiritual ones.” (#2223)*

*Through the grace of the sacrament of marriage, parents receive the responsibility and privilege of evangelizing their children. Parents should initiate their children at an early age into the mysteries of the faith of which they are the “first heralds” for their children. They should associate them from their tenderest years with the life of the Church. (#2225)*

*Education in the faith by the parents should begin in the child’s earliest years. This already happens when family members help one another to grow in faith by the witness of a Christian life in keeping with the Gospel. Family catechesis precedes, accompanies, and enriches other*

*forms of instruction in the faith. Parents have the mission of teaching their children to pray and to discover their vocation as children of God.*  
(#2226)

## **The father as headmaster**

If the family is a school of religious education, then the father is the headmaster—the chief educator and prophetic teacher of the faith. Why? As unpopular as it is to say these days, the father is the head of the home, just as Christ is head of the Church. Fathers are entrusted by God with a lawful authority, and thus, a grave responsibility, to shepherd and care for their families, just as Christ cares for and shepherds the Church.

With this authority as head of the home, the father has the ultimate responsibility to catechize his children in the ways of God. And at the hour of his death, each father, more than anyone else, will answer before God for how well he has fulfilled this grave duty.

## **Practically speaking...**

While the father as prophet may not be a difficult concept, it may be difficult to know how to put this understanding into practice—especially if your father didn't model this teaching role for you. The most important thing to remember is that children will learn far more by your example than by your words, though what you say is of course important.

That said, here are some ideas on how to exercise your role as prophetic teacher of your family.

1. Pray with your children, morning and evening
2. [Bless them](#)
3. Review a catechism – Catechisms have fallen out of favor in recent years, but they are an excellent way to teach your children the faith in a simple and straight forward manner. Of course, the Catechism of the Catholic Church is too heavy for a child, so I recommend the tried and true Baltimore Catechism (Parts [1](#) and [2](#)).
4. Be a student of the faith yourself – You can't teach what you don't know
5. Receive the sacraments frequently
5. Apologize when you sin toward them – This requires a lot of humility, but it will teach them the power of forgiveness
7. Teach them about the lives of the saints – Forget Batman and Spider Man, the Church gives us thousands of real-life superheroes!
3. Pray frequently – St. John Paul II was launched on his path to the priesthood, and eventually the papacy by waking in the middle of the night and seeing his father praying. A father's prayer life is incredibly powerful.
9. Listen to their needs and concerns
0. Take them to mass, and not just on Sunday
  1. Read an age appropriate spiritual book together
  2. Be genuine – Kids have a powerful ability to detect hypocrisy. They will know if you are

faking it.

3. Be faithful – If you tell your children you will do something, you better do everything in your power to make it happen. Few things are more devastating to a child than their father going back on his word. Faithfulness teaches them about God’s faithfulness
4. Suffer well – Suffering heroically is intrinsic to the Catholic faith. Teach your children to “offer it up” by doing so yourself.
5. Love their mother – Broken marriages are the norm these days, and that’s why it’s all the more important that you model true, sacrificial love for your wife. Teach your kids how much Christ loves the Church by how you love your wife.

## Conclusion

To summarize, Jesus modeled for us the prophetic, truth-telling role that we are to have in our families. He described his entire life as a mission “to bear witness to the truth.” We, too, should bear witness to the truth in our words and example, showing our children what Christ-like love looks like and teaching them the truths of the Catholic and Apostolic faith.

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