

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

The first concern of those who teach children
should be to help them avoid sin

56.1 First Point

As you are God's ministers in the work you that you have to do, you should cooperate with him³⁵⁶ and enter into his plan to procure the salvation of the children entrusted to you, especially the ones most inclined to lead wayward lives. Today's Gospel tells you that you must watch over these more closely than over those who spontaneously embrace what is right and practice piety. This Our Lord teaches when he tells us the parable of the Good Shepherd, who, when one of his hundred sheep went astray, left the ninety-nine others alone, to go searching for the one which was lost.³⁵⁷

You should do all you can to help those come back to God who may be subject to some vice, because, as Jesus Christ says, It is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that even a single one of these little ones should perish.³⁵⁸ Since, then, he is the one who employs you to guide them in the way of salvation, see to it that none of them goes astray, or if some do, that they come back without any delay. Your duty is to make them follow the right path.

56.2 Second Point

One of the main things which most contributes to the corruption of young people is keeping bad company. Few go astray from malice of heart. The majority are corrupted by bad example and by the circumstances that they encounter. This is why there is nothing that those who guide children should pay more attention to than to prevent them from being led astray by either of these two causes.

If human weakness is great because of our inclination to sin, that of children is much greater because they have little use of their reason, and because nature is consequently more lively in them and strongly inclined to enjoy the pleasures of the senses. As a result they can easily be led into sin.

Apply yourself, therefore, with all possible care to keep your disciples away from bad companions, and see to it that they associate only with good ones, so that in this way having only good example, they will practice what is good with great ease.

56.3 Third Point

God has given us two sure means to keep from sin and to preserve grace, namely, prayer and the sacraments, there is consequently nothing that we should more strongly inspire in children, in order to give them a horror for vice, than love of prayer and the frequent use of the sacraments. You must get them to pray to God often and to pray with attention. You must teach them the holy dispositions which they ought to bring to receive the sacraments well, and urge them to do so frequently in order to keep their consciences free from all sin. These are the two main things you should keep in mind in the instructions you give to your students in order to keep them away from sin.

You should also pray much to God for those you see less inclined to piety so that God will put in their hearts a desire for salvation. You are mediators for them, and God uses you to teach them the way they are to be saved.³⁵⁹ Fulfill, then, the office God has entrusted to you; otherwise, God will make you accountable for their loss, if for lack of having been kept from sin and encouraged to do good they fall into disorder.

364 Mt 5:20

365 Rom 8:27

366 Mt 5:23

367 Lk 6:27-28

368 Mt 5:20

369 Ps 116:6