

Messages from Pope Francis

Based on
"Hope- Pope Francis, the Autobiography"

Part 2/3: Grow from Mistakes



In his autobiography, *Hope*, Pope Francis shared seven life-experiences that are relevant to tutoring the hearts of school-aged children. They are summarized in a three-part series. This Newsletter, #2, focuses on growing from mistakes. Newsletter #1 focuses on promoting Christian Character, and Newsletter #3 focuses on managing emotional stress.

Human beings make mistakes because of inaccurate or incomplete information, misperception, lack of knowledge, inexperience, emotional "blindspots," or immaturity. But mistakes do not have to have the last word! Mistakes can be transformed into valuable life-lessons and growth in self-knowledge.

Parents gift their children when they teach them how to name, then claim, and then tame mistakes and/or misbehavior. The process implies teaching children how to be reflective . . . how to get in touch with their feelings of discomfort or disappointment or guilt . . . how to let those feelings tutor their heart to desire to grow from the mistake.

Each of us was created in the image and likeness of God. We are "Imago Dei." As a young child, Pope Francis had a sense of his Christ-centered identity. And when he made decisions that were contrary to that identity, he was disappointed in himself. He felt a sense of guilt

and shame. But rather than be paralyzed by the negative, he faced himself, determined to improve, and grew in grace.

This is the lesson and perspective that parents and teachers ought to weave into the formation of children. Let them know that, by nature, Jorge Bergoglio was short-tempered and could be harsh with others. Sometimes he gave into negative impulses of which he was later ashamed. Little-by-little, he mastered those human impulses. He did not let his mistakes define him. Years later, when we met him as Pope Francis, he was gentle, patient, loving, welcoming, non-judgmental, and respectful of others even if he did not agree with them.

Share with your children the following two incidents from Pope Francis' childhood. One from his fourth-grade year and the other from freshman year in a boarding school. There is hope for all of us!

FOURTH GRADE -- Swearing at a Teacher

"One day in the fourth grade, I don't know why, Señora Lia told me off and I could think of nothing better to do than swear at her. The teacher remained calm. She took my exercise book and wrote that she wished to see my mother, and Mamá obviously went there the following day. They spoke for quite a while, then called me. I went in with my head down and eyes even lower, and Mamá told me off. "Say sorry to the teacher," she said, and I did. "Give the teacher a kiss," and I did. The teacher sent me back into class, and I was happy because I thought I had got away with it. But the second act took place when I got back home after school." (HOPE, p 90)

- Calmly speak with your child. Ask him/her to **name** the problem-behavior; to **claim** it by taking ownership for the situation; and to **tame** it by saying how to avoid a future repeat.
- Engage your child in choosing how to restore "right relations" with the offended person.
- Work in tandem with the school. Disagree in private. Hold your child to the behavioral standards of the school.
- Pray with your child an **Act of Contrition**.

NINTH GRADE -- Bullying/Fighting in Middle School

- **LOVE and LIKE** are not synonyms. Teach your child that LOVE means to give respect to all – even people you dislike.
- LOVE means to include, to greet, to invite, to share, to ask for help, to offer help, to show respect, etc.
- Explain that we cannot control others; we are responsible to control ourselves.
- Expect your child to take responsibility for the consequences of a poor decision.
- Adopt the mantra that "An explanation is not an excuse."

"The atmosphere between classmates was friendly, though not without the occasional quarrel and falling-out – with two boys in particular, whom the rest of us soon regarded as stupid and incompetent. We didn't bully them but treated them rather with a kind of contempt, with scorn.

With one of these two, it ended in a brawl. It upset me for a long while because it hadn't been handled well on my part. In the fight I had thrown him to the ground, and he struck his head as he fell and even lost his senses, and I had done it moreover in a cowardly manner, which was beneath me. My father took me to visit him at his home. I found him in bed, apologized to him, and matters were gradually resolved. The boy joined the rest of the group. . . but the burden of what I had done, of my feeling of being wrong, didn't go away." (HOPE, p. 101)