

# The Dynamics of Transmitting the Faith: A Family Life Story

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**Abstract** - This is a qualitative case study of a Christian Living Awardee and her family about the dynamics of living and transmitting the Catholic faith within their family and beyond. The researchers conducted this study during the academic year 2016-2017 in St. Joseph's School of Mactan, Lapu-Lapu City, Cebu, Philippines. They asked permission from the proper authorities for the conduct of the study. They also asked for the informed consent of the parents of the chosen family. Once they were granted, they conducted a focus group discussion with the chosen family. Some of the themes extracted are: Faith considered as the "best gift" of parents to their children; Faith as "North Star"; Parents come from families with deep faith; Spiritual activities done as a family: Going to Holy Mass together, Holy Rosary; Practicing Faith, Nurturing the Faith; Good Example of Parents; Sharing the faith with peers by example; Being friendly. The researchers recommend the offering of continuing education in the faith for parents, educators, catechists and other formators in coordination with the parish priests, sharing of books and references like the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Compendium, teaching of Catechism especially in the public schools.

**Keywords:** Qualitative Case Study, faith, secularism, Christian Living Awardee

## INTRODUCTION

Among the characteristics that describe Filipinos, the value of faith in God is considered very important[1]. For many years, the Philippines has been the only predominant Catholic nation in the whole Asia. To date, almost five centuries after Magellan brought the Catholic faith, many Filipinos continue to cherish and value their faith in God [2]. Although there is a diversity of religions in the Philippines, Roman Catholicism is still the dominant religion practiced by 85% of the population [3]. Among all Asian countries, the Philippines is the only country with a predominantly Catholic population [4]. As a result of centuries of Spanish Catholic colonial rule, the Catholic faith has become a part of the Filipino culture [5]. For many Filipinos Catholic practices and ethnic identity are intricately interwoven into cultural meanings of identity, family, and community [6]. They have drawn strength from a wide variety of Catholic and Christian practices and attitudes to help them manage daily challenges and

hardships. Based on Sacred Scripture, Tradition and Church teachings, many Filipino Catholics dutifully attend mass and services so that they can incorporate virtues into their daily lives[7]. They turn to faith-based ways to manage life's challenges. This cultural disposition is so ingrained that official church-sanctioned activities are not necessarily essential for keeping a practice of Catholicism alive. For instance, praying to God or raising one's heart and mind to God is very much a part of their day to day experiences. Parents would often remind their children to say their prayers upon waking up and before going to bed. Upon waking up, they thank God for the brand new day and seek His guidance for the daily tasks in store that day. Before going to bed, they say thank you for the day's special kind of inner joy and peace. They are happy to pray to God and thank him for all the blessings received from day to day. They also feel happy when they pray to God and to entrust to Him their many worries and trials in life, and ask Him for courage and strength to carry on. Whenever they pray,

they are actually relating with God, communicating with him. Prayer is considered as one of the best ways to unburden their concerns and troubles in life, what they feel deep inside their hearts and minds that they at times cannot disclose to anyone. Through prayers, they get a chance to tell all to God. They believe that He is listening to every word they say, and many would affirm that they have lots of experience of blessings and answers to their prayers. It is this relationship with God that most Filipinos treasure, and that give them that inner joy and peace[8].

Besides, all Christians are mandated to hand on the treasure of faith, from one generation to another...sharing to everyone the joy of the Gospel[9]-[10]. Answering this call to share the gift of faith, the researchers wanted to capture the dynamics of such a sublime process in the Philippine setting through a real life story that can serve as an inspiration for others to embark on the same endeavour.

For faith or belief in God in the context of Catholicism has many dimensions. It is defined as “the substance of things to be hoped for, the evidence of things that are not seen” [11]. It is essential to being a Christian and to having a right and loving relationship with God and neighbor. Moreover, without faith it is impossible to please God [12]. It is also a grace, a gift of God, a supernatural virtue infused by Him [13]; a theological virtue by which man gives his whole assent to God and to everything He reveals and teaches through the Catholic Church.

However, living the Catholic faith in the 21<sup>st</sup> century arena is challenged by a world getting more and more secularized [14]. Secularism refers to a system of doctrines and practices which reject any form of religious faith and worship. Essentially, it says that man does not need God. It aims to eliminate all religious elements in society to make people worldly and unspiritual. It claims that there is no objective or absolute truths defining right and wrong. It is an error that seeks to deprive anyone and anything of its religious character, its spiritual influence and significance. It represents complete freedom from religion or no religion at all, and consequently religious influence is minimized in the public sphere [15]. According to Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, “secularism, closed to transcendence, is a strange forgetfulness of God [16].

Ryan [17] questioned the view of secularism explaining that *“there has been a tendency to relegate religion to the private sphere, to suggest that it should*

*have as little as possible to do with economic, social and political life. But a valueless society is unthinkable, for human nature is essentially moral. A life without any reference to moral principles would simply be not human. A common set of community accepted moral values is indispensable for the good operation of every society; for religion is the safest guardian of moral values in human society.”*

Besides, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council [18] considered the separation of Christian faith and daily life as one of the most serious errors of the present time. It will be the mission of lay *people* in the Church, whose natural environment is the secular city, to bridge this gap and bring the moral values of the gospel to the issues of everyday life. Likewise, in *Gaudium et Spes* [19], a document of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council, the Catholic Church urges the Christian faithful - after describing how Christians are “citizens of two cities” – the earthly and the heavenly- *“to strive to discharge their earthly duties conscientiously and in response to the Gospel spirit”*. The Church expresses its *“desire to add the light of revealed truth to humankind's store of experience”* but at the same time, *“it is convinced that it (Church) can be abundantly helped by the world in the matter of preparing the ground for the Gospel”*.

As an antidote to secularism, the Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI proposes an adult faith, one “deeply rooted in friendship with Christ,” making “truth in love.” He added that young people need to be taught and shown that there is such a thing as knowable objective truth. They need to learn how freedom and moral responsibility work together and lead to a virtuous life. [20]. He stressed for the need of the “dynamism” of Christian life in the following terms: “We must be enlivened by a holy restlessness - *a restlessness to bring to everyone the gift of faith, of friendship with Christ*. Truly, the love and friendship of God was given to us so that it might also be shared with others.... All people desire to leave a lasting mark. But what endures? Money does not. Even buildings do not, nor books. After a certain time, longer or shorter, all these things disappear. The only thing that lasts forever is the human soul, the human person created by God for eternity,” he said [21]. Pope Francis [22] also encourages the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by joy, while pointing out new paths for the Church’s journey in years to come.

In front of this challenging panorama, many people, including the researchers, are, more than ever, restless and are searching for exemplars who are

normal, ordinary people struggling to put their faith into practice day by day. They want to benchmark and learn from these cheerful, sportive Catholics about their “secrets” in living and handing on their faith to others.

This interest prompts the researchers to conduct a case study involving a family of a *Christian Living Awardee* of St. Joseph’s School of Mactan, Lapu-Lapu City, Cebu, Philippines, during the academic year 2016-2017. They focus their study on the family, fully aware that the Philippine society is familial, that is, Filipinos place a high value to their families. They get strength and stability from their families, considered as the basic cell of society, the first school where children learn their faith and values.[23].

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The researchers want to gain a deeper understanding about the dynamics of transmitting the faith within the family and beyond. Specifically, they seek to answer the following questions:

1. What led the parents to transmit the Catholic faith to their children?
2. How were the parents able to transmit the faith to their children?
3. How were the children able to share their faith to their classmates and friends?
4. What were the struggles and challenges met by parents and children along the way?
5. How did they face and handle these challenges?
6. What do the family members do to nurture and grow in their faith?

### METHODOLOGY

The researchers utilized the qualitative case study, a versatile research design, to gather rich and in-depth information about a single bounded entity through the stories of the participants. For this design is very unique for what it can reveal about a phenomenon, a knowledge which one would not otherwise have access to Sharon [24].

Though the present study focuses only on a single unit - one family - and the results are not be generalizable, readers can *vicariously* learn a lot from it [25]. It “gets the researchers to be very close to the subject of interest, due to direct observation in natural setting and by access to subjective factors like thoughts, feelings and desires,” explained Bromkey [26].

It is useful when the focus of the study is to answer the “why” and “how” questions, as in the case

of the present study. Its purpose is to describe a particular case in detail and take learning from the case. The colorful description offers insights and illumines meanings that expand the readers’ experiences.

Moreover, since the general lies in the particular, what one learns from the particular can be transferred to similar situations. For it is the reader, not the researchers, who determines what can apply to his/her context [27].

For the participants of the study, the researchers chose as the one bounded unit, the family of a student who is a recipient of a *Christian Living (CL) Award* of St. Joseph’s School of Mactan, Cebu, a Catholic school, during school year 2016-2017. The sought-after Christian Living (CL) Award is only given to very few students – only 1-2 per year level who exhibit the following: (a) Gives respect to oneself, teachers, persons in authority or any individual belonging to the school community; (b) Manifests a sense of responsibility and honesty in discharging one’s duties as a Christian in school and in the community; (c) Shows concern and willingness to be of service to others; (d) Observes rules and regulations religiously; (e) Conducts oneself properly at all times[28].

As the famous dictum goes “*by their fruits, we will know the tree*”, the researchers chose the family of a” CL Awardee” with the premise that she was a recipient of the award thanks to her parents and siblings who have guided and given her a good formation at home.

The chosen awardee is Grade 11 student, 16 years old, female, youngest of a family of 5 children Her father, 59 years old, works in a manufacturing company in Mactan Export Zone, Cebu, while her mother, a certified accountant entrepreneur, is 58 years old. The older four siblings are: the eldest is a graduate of Hotel and Restaurant Management and presently works in a hotel; the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the eldest is a licensed mechanical engineer, also working in Mactan Export Zone; the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the eldest is a licensed Medical Technologist and works in a Community Hospital; the 4<sup>th</sup> is a college student taking up Human Resource management in University of San Carlos, Cebu.

The researchers wrote a letter to the school principal informing her about the Research they were conducting and requesting her endorsement for them to interview a CL Awardee and her family. Once the permission and endorsement were given, the researchers explained their research to the chosen

participant and her family-parents and siblings who were very willing to cooperate. They also asked for the family's agreement that the conversation be audio-taped for greater accuracy. Only when they were given permission, that they started the focus group discussion (FGD) using a semi-structured interview guide.

Some questions asked are as follows: 1. *How do they see and value your Catholic faith?* 2. *How do they practice your faith in the family?* 3. *How do parents transmit their faith to: a) their children b) other families* 4. *What are some challenges that parents experience in transmitting the faith to their children?* 5. *How did they face these challenges?* 6. *What can they say to the fact that their child/sister is a CL Awardee?* 7. *What for them is the meaning of this award?*

Once the focus group discussion has been finished, the researchers played back the audio-tape several times to ascertain the meanings the participants wanted to convey. They then transcribed the field notes and analyzed for significant statements. They also formulated the meanings and articulated the themes, following Collaizi's method of data analysis [29].

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results are condensed in the following themes:

1. Faith as the best gift of parents to their children
2. Faith as "North Star"
3. Parents come from families with deep faith
4. Spiritual activities done as a family: Going to Holy Mass together, Holy Rosary
5. Practicing Faith, Transmitting it and Overcoming Difficulties through Prayer, Holy Mass, Trust in God
6. Nurturing the Faith
7. Good Example of Parents
8. Sharing the faith with peers by example
9. Being friendly

The details of the emerging themes are as follows:

### 1. **Faith as the best gift of parents to their children**

Both father and mother affirmed that:

*"We teach the faith and value it so much because we strongly believe that Life of Christ present in the soul of the kids is the best gift we can give as parents. It is through teaching faith that we are able to make alive the presence of Christ in our homes and make the kids look at things in the right perspective."*

### 2. **Faith as "North Star"**

One of the children remarked:

*"In general, faith is what drives me to do great things for the Lord; it allows me to look at the world and see and appreciate the beauty that the Father has created for us. Faith serves as the strong foundation of my life as a person since this also serves as my "guidebook" on how to live my life the way God wants."* (CL Awardee)

The "North Star" is something that is constant and dependable, in an ever changing world [30]. In this case, it refers to the deposit of the faith, the content of the revealed truths and morals, constantly expounded by the teaching magisterium of the Catholic Church. It serves as the light and guide, in one's journey through life.

### 3. **Parents come from families with deep faith**

*"I obtained my faith ever since birth because I was born in a Catholic family, where faith is alive in the home and we grew up in Christian values."* (Mother)

*"I come from a devout Catholic family. My mother was a Papal Awardee and taught in the seminary. The example of my parents serves as my model on how to bring up my newly formed family."* (Father)

### 4. **Spiritual Activities done as a Family: Going to Holy Mass together, Holy Rosary, Pilgrimage**

One of them said:

*"My family always find time to pray together as a family; whether it is a simple 1 Our Father, 1 Hail Mary and 1 Glory Be prayer or praying the Holy Rosary together. Aside from that, we also engage in pilgrimage as my parents believed that this is the real bonding for families, one that involves God. Thus, we find time at least once a month to go on different pilgrimages. We go to church together as family and during Advent and Christmas season, we gather around together to listen to the good news for the day."* (CL Awardee)

This confirmed what Pope Francis said, in his speech during the 2015 Meeting with Families at Mall of Asia, Philippines [17] He explained *"It is in the family that we first learn how to pray, to come to know God, to grow as men and women of faith, to see ourselves as members of God's family - the Church. In the family we learn how to love, to forgive, to be generous and open, not closed and selfish. We need to move beyond our own needs, to encounter others and share our lives with them...That is why it is important*

to pray as family. That is why families are very important in God's plan for the Church."

### **5. Practicing the Faith, Transmitting it and Overcoming challenges through Prayer, attending Holy Mass, Trust in God**

The family members answered the following:

*"I am able to practice my faith through deep conversations with God in prayer, attending the Mass daily, and living up with the values being taught."* (Mother)

*"I am able to share the faith to my kids especially in difficult times because there is victory in prayer."* (Father)

Another one said:

*"Dealing with everyday life is a challenge for our faith but this can be surpassed through prayer."* (Sibling 2)

The other sibling also remarked:

*"I am extremely challenged when I lose my temper because there are times that I lose sense in what I believe in. I am able to overcome it by calming down after which, I engage in prayer to really calm myself."* (Sibling 1)

Another sibling remarked:

*"The road to Graduation and Board Exams were some challenges that really tested my faith. It was through these challenges that I prayed hard. Prayer was the key to solve this."* (Sibling 3)

The mother added:

*"Yes, struggles were present. Generations nowadays have different priorities compared to the ones before and there is difficulty in finding time on how to inculcate prayer. I overcame this struggle by having complete and utter trust and faith in the Lord. My kids were able to experience the victories I had through prayer that is why their perspective on this topic changed and they learned to develop this."*

It is heart-warming to note that difficulties or the "cross" in day-to-day living was never lacking even to this chosen family. Indeed, nobody is spared from difficulties. Yet, the main difference lies in how they are taking it. The members of this family as observed took it with supernatural sense, in varying degrees.

They faced the "cross" with complete faith and trust in God, with recourse to prayer and the attendance to Holy Mass.

### **6. Nurturing the faith**

One of them said:

*"I nurture my faith through the daily reading and reflection of the Gospel for the day. I engage in prayer and join in Church activities and organizations as these helped me nurture and preserve my faith. Aside from that, I carry around me a rosary everywhere I go since I believe that this is the most powerful weapon that I can have in nurturing and spreading my faith."* (CL Awardee)

Another sibling added:

*"My faith is in progress, it goes on and on and there was never a time when it turned off or stopped, thank God."* (Sibling 4).

These comments are in consonance with what Pope Francis said in his speech to the Filipino Families during his 2015 Pastoral Visit to the Philippines [18]: *"To hear and accept God's call, to make home for Jesus...you must make time each day for prayer. But you may tell me: Holy Father, I want to pray but there is so much work to do! I must take care of my children; I have chores at home; I am too tired even to sleep well. This may be true, but if we do not pray, we will not know the most important thing of all: God's will for us. And for all our activity, our busy-ness, without prayer, we will accomplish very little."*

### **7. Good Example of Parents**

One of the children said:

*"My parents transmit the faith by example and practice; meaning, they show us the basics about faith and it is up to us to discover more about it so that we would have our own approach towards it. Moreover, my parents transmitted faith to me by allowing me to grow in a community appropriate for our belief and gave opportunities for a wider knowledge for this. They served as role models for faith and it was them that they became my first teachers for this."* (CL Awardee)

### **8. Sharing the faith with peers by example**

One of them said:

*"I share my faith with my friends by showing them the beauty and mystery hidden in it through practice and application in life. Aside from that, I am able to share my faith through inviting them to join in other spiritual activities that help strengthen the faith."* (CL Awardee)

## 9. Being friendly

The mother explained:

*"I am able to pass my faith from different generations by being friendly and having a well-rounded and good relationship to the people around me and through the teaching of my parents to pray."*

The story of the family chosen in this study sheds light on the *dynamics* of transmitting the gift of faith within the family and beyond. It is facilitated when parents see the gift of faith as the "North Star" – a guide book on how to live one's life the way God wants - so the *best gift they can give to their children* since it helps them to live in the presence of Christ and make them see things and events with the right outlook.

This confirms what Ocariz [30] explained that faith enlightens people's minds and gives meaning to their lives. It opens up a new dimension that leads them to live the life of Christ. Parents are helped to set this Christian tone thanks to their Christian homes and the good upbringing they received from their parents, which served as their reference point. Indeed, parents transmitted the faith to their children in a similar way that their parents transmitted in to them.

The parents in this study are fortunate since they can count, as their point of reference, on the Christian upbringing they got from their own parents. But how about the other parents, who come from homes where faith was **not** practiced nor cherished? What can they pass on when they have not experienced living in such a "Christian atmosphere"?

The researchers believe that parents who may not be blessed to come from homes with "pious parents who love and practice their faith" **can start learning from the "secrets" of the blessed parents portrayed in this real story**, on how to bring up their children in the faith. They are also invited, to follow the example of praying for God's guidance, exert effort to learning more about the faith, humility and openness to ask for advice from other parents and support groups in the parishes or schools as God does not abandon His people.

Moreover, this case study brought to the fore the importance of parents as primary educators of their children especially in faith and values. Indeed, the home is the first school for the faith and values of the children, our future leaders and citizens. Parents have the "sweet duty" of guiding their children develop their intellect, will and educating their emotions so that they become children with strong faith in God early on and become adults who practice the human and Christian virtues and who cheerfully share the beauty of faith to the people around them.

Parents are also called to give good example of prayer life, and fostering it through some common acts of piety like going to Holy Mass- the greatest sacrament and sacrifice - together as a family on Sundays and holy days of obligation, and praying the holy rosary, among others. It substantiates what Pope Francis explained during his Pastoral Visit to the Philippines in 2015: *"It is in the family that we first learn how to pray, to come to know God, to learn how to love, to forgive, to be generous, to be open, to grow as men and women of faith, to see ourselves as members of God's family – the Church"* [31]. As Father Peyton [32] used to say, *"the family that prays together stays together"*. Through their struggle to live as coherent Christians, children easily catch the "good" values and they follow suit. No wonder, the children from families like this one, are strong in their faith, and end up awardees without really trying hard, and in a natural way, they are happy to share the beauty of faith to their peers.

Indeed, as St. John Paul II [33] affirms: *"The future of humanity passes by way of the family."* Moreover, Pope Francis [34] reminds us that *"faith does not remove us from the world, but even draws us deeply into it. Each of us, in fact, has a special role in preparing for the coming of God's kingdom in the world. Just as the gift of the Holy family was entrusted to St. Joseph, so the gift of the family and its place in God's plan is entrusted to us."*

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

The dynamics of the handing on of faith from one generation to another is facilitated by parents with strong faith who consider "faith in God" as the best gift they can give to their children for it serves as the "North Star" in their journey through life. Parents as the primary educators of their children especially in the faith and values are effective, with God's grace, especially through their struggle to practice and nurture their faith, hope and love for God and others

in their everyday life by recourse to sacraments especially the Holy Mass, prayer, trust in God and forming their children, as best as they can, to do likewise. By grace and osmosis, children catch the “good virus and values” and also share the beauty of faith to others. The good example of parents means a lot to their children. Some acts of piety done as a family like going to Mass together, praying the rosary or going for pilgrimages increase family bonding and unity. Being friendly and having good relations with others also facilitate in the sharing of the faith to peers and other people.

In light of the results of the study, the researchers propose that given the crucial role of parents, guardians, formators or catechists, in transmitting the faith to their families and beyond, a continuing education about the content of faith, nurturing and transmitting of the faith to the children through seminars or short courses be given to them- depending on their level of knowledge- to some, basic while to others, advanced - in close coordination with the parish priests. For one cannot give what one does not have. In this way, they can go deeper in their knowledge of the faith and the teachings of the Church and so be equipped to give answers to anyone “who asks for a reason for the hope that is in them” [35]. This may be initiated by the schools or parishes. The nurturing of faith through classes in *Christian Living* or religion classes or giving of catechism classes in public schools may also be strengthened. There is much religious ignorance nowadays and going back to basics or presenting the faith in a joyful and attractive way will be very much appreciated. Likewise, the “sharing of faith” to others may also be strengthened through sharing of good books and references such as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church, the Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church* or watching the EWTN television program. The one-on-one mentoring/coaching with parents and students by experts is also recommended. These are just some concrete ways to answer the call of Pope Francis who explains: “*Families be faithful to your calling! The world counts on you, strong families, to share the joy and enthusiasm of your faith, hope, and love for GOD and others. Proclaim without getting tired the beauty and truth of the Christian faith to society.*”[36]and Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI [37] who said “*help people to discover the true star which points out the way to us: Jesus Christ.*”

Due to time constraint, this study only focuses on one single family of a Christian Living Awardee.

Future researches may be conducted that consider more families of exemplary students to validate the initial research.

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