

Introduction

Dear Friend,

This little book is all about hope. It is about your hope in God and his hope in you.

It describes the resplendent light and power God gives to men and women when he calls them to their holy mission of parenthood. It lays out the promises God makes to parents when he entrusts them with their children's souls—and counts on them to lead their children to a great life here on earth and then life with him forever.

I have called this work *Anchor* for a reason.

From the earliest age of the Church, the anchor has been a symbol of hope for Christians. It was scratched on the graves of early Christian martyrs. It has ever been a sign of Christ's protection through the storms of life to those who love him. The Epistle to the Hebrews (6: 19) says of Christ, "We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul. . . ."

St. Paul knew a few things about storms and shipwrecks. In his famous litany of the travails he endured for Christ (2 Cor 11: 23–30), he mentions being shipwrecked three times. In yet another sea-storm off the shores of Malta, he nearly perished; but he and the ship were saved just in time by the protective force of anchors. St. Luke, his companion on the journey, described this event vividly in Acts 27: "Then fearing that we might run on the rocks, they let out four anchors from the stern, and prayed for day to come."

You too have an anchor that gives salvation to your mission. That anchor is the faith and hope you have in God, who protects you and your family as his tenderly beloved children.

This book is, in a sense, a companion and sequel to *Lifeline: The Religious Upbringing of Your Children*. In that work, I described how Christian parents—men and women just like you—manage to bring up their children right, that is, how they

lead their children to God and a great life. It outlined a job description, if you will, of the vocation to parenthood.

But as you know, this task of raising children takes years of patient, sometimes valiant, effort. It calls for holding on through roller-coaster ups and downs, reverses and triumphs, ongoing challenges that can strain your stamina and patience and peace of mind. To persevere through all of this, you need the anchor of hope—of *the* Hope, of Christ himself.

So I've written *Anchor* for you: for your confidence and peace of mind. *Anchor* says to you, in effect, "Hang in there! It's worth it. You are doing God's will, and so he smiles on you. He trusts you, blesses you, and will never fail you. This he promised."

Because you are so busy, I have made this book brief and straight to the point. As you can see with a glance through its pages, its format is not that of a text or treatise. Rather, I have collected bits of hope-filled advice and encouragement from many sources, above all the Scriptures. These I have configured in a pithy, point-by-point way—like the counsels you'd receive from a spiritual director.

This is the format you would find in other spiritual works: the *Didache* of the ancient Church, the matchless *Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis, and the luminous works of St. Josemaría Escrivá directed to busy laypeople (*The Way*, *Furrow*, and *The Forge*). I do not claim that *Anchor* stands on the high spiritual plane of these other works. But my intention is the same: to give you ideas to read and reread over the course of years, to think and pray about from time to time, as reminders of your mission, sources for your hope, inspirations to your perseverance.

I should say here that the core spirituality of *Anchor* derives from that of St. Josemaría Escrivá, the founder of Opus Dei, whose holy life and teachings inspire countless parents to the love and service of God in normal life. As a priest, he has been a spiritual father to millions, including me. I owe him the gratitude of a son.

In January of 2001, Pope John Paul II—another great spiritual father—addressed a milestone Apostolic Letter to the

whole Church, both for now and through the centuries to come. In this work, “Setting Forth into the New Millennium,” the Holy Father laid out God’s blueprint for the Church’s next missionary expansion throughout the world: personal holiness. Not only piety, not only a good life, but holiness itself. He set plainly as a course of action what the Second Vatican Council taught: We are all called to be saints—to be the kind of men and women who, with souls enkindled by the Holy Spirit, will renew the face of the earth.

Holiness, nothing less. This is what God calls you to. This is what God wills for your children. And this is what *Anchor* is all about.

The book is divided into four chapters. The first three follow from a stirring and beautiful passage about vocation in the Book of Jeremiah that should stand as a guidepost on your journey. These three chapters explore the following three ideas: your divine vocation, your life of prayer with God, and your faithful perseverance to final triumph.

I have saved the best, though, for the fourth chapter, the passages from the Old and New Testaments in which God speaks to you, heart to heart, about the splendid adventure of your calling. There you will find God’s promises to you, your anchor of hope now and in the years to come.

1.

Your Sacred Mission as a Parent

If you wish to understand the sublime reality of your vocation from God, his mission to you as a parent, you may begin by doing this: Return to the time of your childhood, that age when this world filled you with wonder, and look at the nighttime sky the way you did as a child. We adults, from time to time, need to see life as children see it—which is the way God sees it—a gift of wondrous beauty and a call to adventure.

When we lift our eyes to the heavens on a clear, cloudless night, we see the swirl of stars God flung across the endless expanse of the universe. And if we have eyes illumined by faith, we can look on this divine array the way our Christian forebears have done for centuries: With faith's insight, we know that God set these sparkling gems against the black velvet of night to delight each of us, his beloved children, and to show us his splendid might and mystery.

You, with the eyes of a Christian parent, can perceive even deeper meaning. As you sweep your gaze across the heavens, let your mind thrill with this wondrous idea: Countless ages ago, before those stars took fire, God placed you—you, personally, by name—within his eternal plan. It was then that he called you to your divine life's mission.

God knew then, and knows now, everything about you: all the great and small events of your life, your childhood and upbringing, your gifts and flaws and sins, the destiny of your whole life throughout this slip of human history in which he placed you. He knew all those souls whose lives intertwine with your own, including your parents and friends, spouse and children, from the moment of your conception to the appointed hour of your passage to eternity.