



Opening Question:

What memories do you have about your parents when you were growing up?

Many people look back on their youth with nostalgia. Some, however, would never want to relive their childhood. Youth can be a time of joy and fear. How hard was it to grow up? On the flip side of the coin, how hard is it to be a parent in the good times and the bad? In Luke's gospel, Mary and Joseph faced a challenging event with Jesus as a boy.

When Jesus was twelve years old, Mary and Joseph took him to Jerusalem for Passover. After the festival, they started home. But, the young boy Jesus remained in Jerusalem and his parents didn't realize it. When they didn't find him among the traveling party, they returned to Jerusalem to look for him there.

Three days later, they found Jesus in the Temple sitting with some religious teachers. He listened to what they taught and asked them questions. All who heard him were surprised at his bright answers.

When his parents saw him, they were astonished. "Son, why did you do this to us?" Mary said to Jesus. "Your father and I searched for you everywhere. We were worried about you!"

"Why did you spend all your time looking for me?" Jesus answered. "Didn't you know I'd be in my Father's house, doing what my Father wants me to do?"

Joseph, Mary, and Jesus returned home to Nazareth. There, he obeyed his parents and grew both in wisdom and stature. He pleased God and the people more and more.

Luke 2:42-43, 45-49, 51b-52



After a Passover pilgrimage, Jesus remained behind in the Temple while Mary and Joseph worried about his whereabouts. Despite their concern, Jesus had his priorities right. Duty to God first, family second. Still, the scene did emphasize the challenges a family can have and that can spill outside of the family. Indeed, the cohesion of the family can and does mirror the cohesion of society. Both depend upon the relationship between those in authority and those under authority. The fourth commandment zeroed in on that relationship.

The Fourth Commandment:

Within the Family

Honor your father and your mother that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you.

Exodus 20:12

This was the only positive commandment with a promise. Those under authority are to respect those in authority in order to enjoy the fruits of a well functioning society: peace, prosperity, cohesive cultural identity. Let's consider the focus of the commandment. The basic block of society is the family. It is rooted in the married couple with the procreation and love of children. God created families so all its members enjoy equal

dignity.

The Christian family reveals a domestic church. The family fosters the Christian virtues of faith, hope, love. The family also reflects the community of the Trinity: the Father, Son and Spirit. Three different divine persons with one purpose.

Finally, parents have the responsibility to raise children in the faith through teaching and example. The family is the basic building block of society. The quality of family life has a direct effect on the quality of society. What is honored in the family reflects what is honored in society. For example, solid family life promotes the virtue of charity through care for the elderly, the sick, the poor. Charity begins at home but spreads to society when families cannot care for themselves. Governments should not interfere with the prerogatives of the family but support them.

The fourth commandment has duties that children have for parents and parents have for children. By extension, it implies duties citizens and civic authorities have toward each other. Children owe parents respect because it is rooted in love. Underage children should obey their parents until they leave home. Children should also care for their parents if they cannot care for themselves. Respect within the family also includes the treatment of siblings and the extended family.

Parents have the duty to raise their children with a good sense of morality. They pass along morals through word and example. They should also inspire their offspring with higher social values like education, civic engagement and healthy habits. Parents have the responsibility to pass along the faith to their children through a constant prayer life, active involvement in the local church community, and ongoing religious education. Finally, parents have a duty to create a loving home that fosters strong emotional bonds between family members.

The Fourth Commandment:

Within Society

Let's now turn to the relationship between citizens

and civic authority. As citizens we are called to respect those in authority when they work for the common good. That means we cooperate with them when we pay taxes, exercise our right to vote, serve on juries and partake in the national defense. There are limits to cooperation when authorities overstep conscience. Armed resistance is only legitimate when all other means have been totally exhausted. We are called to welcome the stranger with respect and hospitality.

Civic authorities have the responsibility to serve the citizens not to be served. They are to work for the common good especially when they protect the institution of the family. They are also to emphasize the personal rights of citizens and consider them as neighbors not as numbers. They should look beyond the letter of civic laws and contracts into the values that stand behind those legal documents for the good of all.

The family is the basic building block of society. As such, it mirrors the health and values of the society. Just as children and their parents have obligations to each other, so do citizens and civic authorities. The fourth commandment summed up those obligations with a positive vision. To create a healthy family and a vibrant society, we must build up others with respect and care.

Closing Question:

What challenges do you face as a parent? A sibling? A citizen?

Reference to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Paragraphs 2197-2257.

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