

TEN COMMANDMENTS

Fourth Commandment: Honor Your Father & Mother



REFLECTIONS

He was obedient to them. (Jn. 13:34)

The Catechism of the Catholic Church examines the Fourth Commandment in great depth. As with all the Commandments, the implications of the Fourth Commandment go far beyond honoring your father and mother. It provides clear direction for how the commandment applies to us in all stages of our lives, in all the various types of political and economic situations in which God's people live. We have an expectation that parents will serve as models to teach and guide their children to become responsible, caring, grateful, and faithful adults. Additionally, the Fourth Commandment includes and presumes the duties of instructors, teachers, leaders...all who exercise authority over others or over a community of persons (CCC 2199). (Read *Render Unto Caesar*, by Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, Penguin Random House, 2009.)



Rembrandt, *Family Portrait*, ca. 1668

Your Place in the Family

Gratitude and honor are due to our divine Father, source of all creation, and by extension to our parents for bringing us into the world, for the family is the original cell of social life. The family is the community in which one can learn moral values and gratitude, begin

to honor God, and make good use of freedom – an initiation into life in society. However, there are many families who are at times incapable of providing this help. It entrusts then other persons ... to provide for their needs.” The Fourth Commandment expresses, in a positive way, the relationship of children to their parents, but

also concerns the ties of kinship between members of the extended family (CCC 2207, 2208).

The Fourth Commandment also illuminates other relationships in society. It instructs each person to live in such a way that teaches others to care and take responsibility for the weaker members of society—the young, the old, the sick, the handicapped and the poor (Jas. 1:27; CCC 2212)

- What is your role in a family? In an extended family? Perhaps it's to act as a model by your words or actions, helping to educate a friend's child or to care for your elderly parents.

- Do you show gratitude to God? Do you demonstrate respect for the dignity of others? God has given you a special role in your family— what will you do with it?

Family equals one man, one woman, united in marriage, together with their children.

The Christian family is a communion of persons, a sign and image of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit (CCC 2205). In today's society, we unfortunately see that the definition of family is being distorted, or even changed.

- What does family mean to you? If you do not view yourself as

part of a family, what positive action will you take to change this perception?

- Do you consciously or unconsciously, through your actions or words, undermine the Church's teaching?

To go deeper:

- *Gaudium et spes* 48:4; 52:1–2
- *Lumen gentium* 11
- *Familiaris consortio* 36, 46
- Catechism of the Catholic Church, pg. 530–543.

ACTIVITIES

For Children and Families

For Families:

1. Read Philippians 4:4–8. Share what you hear. How is God speaking to you? The Virgin Mary says, “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior.” How can we rejoice and proclaim the

greatness of the Lord? Consider having a family “Joy Jar.” Have little slips of paper nearby on which parents and children can jot down or dictate moments when they have witnessed and experienced the Lord acting in their life or in the life of another family member. When the jar is full, celebrate and share those moments at a special time.

2. Read Matthew 6:9–15. What do you hear? God, in his love and mercy, always has a word to help us in our lives. The Christian life, infused with the Holy Spirit, is to experience forgiveness and reconciliation with others. Each week, perhaps in a time of family prayer, is there an opportunity for reconciliation between spouses, between siblings, between parents and children? What's the difference between saying, “I'm sorry,” and asking for forgiveness? Is there someone you need to ask for forgiveness? If someone has asked you for forgiveness have you forgiven them?

3. Read aloud Psalm 92. This is a song of thanksgiving for those who follow the way of the Lord. Share what you hear. How is God speaking to you through the scripture? Speaking of the righteous, the concluding verses



include, they still bring forth fruit in old age, they are ever full of sap and green. Remember, also, that God has a special love for orphans and widows (as examples, see Psalm 68:5 and James 1:27). Discuss ways to honor our parents and grandparents. Is it possible, as a family, to visit the elderly who reside in a nursing home?

For Children:

1. Your parents have been co-creators with God in the moment you were created and born. They have been open to the life that God, in his great love, has created in you. Think of an event or happening in your life that brought you much joy and happiness. Perhaps it is a time when you felt loved and comforted. Draw a picture of what happened. Tell, write and/or dictate a description of what happened. Share this work with your parents, perhaps with a handmade card, thanking them for their part in giving the gift of life to you!

2. Read or listen to the words of Jesus from Matthew 19:13–15. What do you hear Jesus saying? To have the kingdom of God is to have complete happiness, peace, and security in your life. It is to have faith that God loves you as you are at each moment of your life. Your parents have brought you into a special relationship with Jesus in the moment of your baptism. Find out the date of your baptism. Have your parents tell you about that day, sharing with you the photos, mementos, and other artifacts from that special day. Each year, have a special celebration on that day!

3. Read or listen to God speaking the Fourth Commandment in

Exodus 20:12. What do you hear? What do you think is the land that God is promising to give you? Out of love for each of us and for our good, God gives the gifts, graces and responsibilities of power, authority and discernment over us to our parents. The Church teaches that God also gives this authority over us, for our good, to our teachers. Make a two-column list. In one column, talk about then list or dictate some of the many things your teacher has taught you. In the second column, talk about then list or dictate some of the ways that your teacher has helped you. These things are a work of God! Make, decorate, and write or dictate a “thank you” card for your teacher. Use some or all of the things that you have listed when you make your card.

For Youth

1. The Fourth Commandment teaches us obedience. Read Genesis 22:1–19. This is the story of Abraham and Isaac. What can you learn from Abraham’s obedience? God tests Abraham’s faith. Abraham responds with perfect obedience and God promises to reward all of humanity because of this obedience. How does God reward humanity? (Hint: on this same mountain another “only Son” was sacrificed. Who was that?)

2. Being obedient to those who have authority over us can be difficult sometimes. This commandment does not only teach obedience to our fathers & mothers, but also all of those in authority. Take time to pray for your parents, grandparents, teachers and your priests every day.

3. Do something special and unexpected for your parents in appreciation for the sacrifices they make for you. Pray about what God wants this action to be.

For Young Adults

1. Read 1 Peter 2:13–25. St. Peter instructs us on the power of perfect obedience. Do we want to change the world? Then we must learn humility and obedience to authority. Jesus Christ models for us both perfect obedience and perfect humble authority. He teaches us to eliminate pride. When reading this passage, reflect on your shortcomings in terms of pride, and how God is encouraging you through these words to adopt more humble obedience.



2. Download the iPieta mobile app. To practice complete obedience to God and His Church, begin each day by praying the Act of Faith, Act of Hope, Act of Charity prayers. End your day by making an examination of Conscience and praying the Act of Contrition.

3. Reflect on Mary’s perfect obedience to the authority and will of God. Mary is “filled with grace” and this transforms her intellect and her will, more perfectly uniting her with the life of God. Pray the

Angelus with this in mind each day, trying to grow in obedience to all of the authorities in your life, and particularly to the will of the God who loves you.

For Adults

1. Search for and watch “The Fourth Commandment: Strengthen Your Family” on Formed.org. The video begins with a couple of minutes of music to help you pray and focus.

2. Read Ephesians 6:1–9. St. Paul teaches us more about the Fourth Commandment. He gives instructions to those in authority, as well as those who are under authority. The only person who models perfect, humble authority is Jesus Christ. What does it mean to be a “slave” of Jesus Christ? How could this benefit us? How is it possible that we experience true freedom through this kind of “slavery”?

3. Read paragraph 17 of *Veritatis Splendor*. You can access this in your binder provided by the parish or online by searching for “Veritatis Splendor.” Obedience to Christ and the commandments of God lead us to authentic freedom. St. John Paul II reflects on the importance of “self-giving” as the foundation for freedom. We all have some sort of authority in our lives over others. Whether it be employees, family members, children, etc we can all grow in “self-giving” to bring others, and ourselves, to freedom. Think about how you model the freedom of Christ to others by your witness. How can you improve your witness in authority to better reflect the perfect leadership of Christ Jesus?

Ministry Leaders

1. This commandment helps us to focus on gratitude for the gifts which God has given us, including our parents. Spend the first part

of your ministry meeting time focusing on gratitude. What are your ministry members grateful for? What graces have you seen through your ministry that you’re grateful for?

2. Another aspect of this commandment has to do with authority, those who God has vested with authority in our lives. This includes our parents, but also the leaders in our world and in our parish. As a ministry leader, what do you do with this authority you’ve been given? How do you lead your volunteers to know and serve God better?

3. A scripture to meditate on with your ministry: “And he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and he was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart” (Luke 2:51).



The Holy Family, Giovanni Battista Salvi da Sassoferrato, 1640–1650

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