

Doctrinal Session

APPRENTICES IN FAITH: A Resource for the RCIA Fourth Commandment: Honoring Our Fathers and Mothers

Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. (Exodus 20:12)

Insight

What attitudes and values are necessary for a healthy, holy family?

It was an important family conference. Jack, Danny, and Gale knew it was going to be a special discussion just from the look on their mom's face when she called the meeting. As a single parent, Cynthia frequently sat down with her two high-school-aged sons and her junior-high daughter.

"Here's the thing," announced their mom, "the nursing home that grandma is in has deteriorated. She's just not getting the care she needs. So we're going to have to adjust. I'd like to bring her here to stay with us until we find a new nursing home for her. It may be that she'll be with us for a handful of months till things get worked out."

The kids greeted this news with silence. It wasn't that they didn't like their grandmother. In fact, it was just the opposite. They revered her. Jack, Danny, and Gale were trying to digest the news and its implications. The eldest, Jack, piped up first, "Where is she going to stay? Will someone have to give up their room?" The family meeting had just begun.

For Reflection . . .

Relationships within a healthy family engender warm affection, respect, and mutuality among parents and children.

Growing up, what was the best aspect of your family?

If your current family had a motto expressing its life and the relationship among its members, what would it say?

Additional Background

Catechism of the Catholic Church: 2197–2257

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults: pages 375–383

Compendium—Catechism of the Catholic Church: 455–465

Church Teaching

Relationships and Life

The Fourth Commandment highlights the sacredness of the family and the potential for life-giving relationships within it. Children owe their lives to their parents, and, therefore, honor is due to parents. This relationship of honor is not, however, one-sided. Parents and children each have responsibilities within the family, all of whose members are equal in dignity.

Parents and Children

One way that mutual respect and care is generated within a family is when parents concretely provide for the basic physical needs of their children and provide for their education. Parents are also responsible for creating an atmosphere of tenderness, forgiveness, and disinterested service of others.

Parents and children together cultivate the virtues of faith, hope, and love so that their family becomes a building block of the parish and of the Church.

A Response of Love

In turn, children respond with love to this affectionate rearing, obeying the reasonable directions of their parents. This filial piety of children also extends to siblings, teachers, and others in authority. As children grow older, they also have a moral responsibility to help their aged, burdened parents, especially if they are sick or lonely.

Relationships within a family are crucial but are seen by the Church as subordinate to the vocation we each have to follow Christ. A child's vocational calling must be respected and nurtured by parents. Indeed, members of Christian families continually encourage and challenge one another to become disciples of the Lord within the Church.