



INTRODUCTION TO CATHOLICISM

Chapter 22

The Fourth Commandment

Love, Honor and Respect.

The Fourth Commandment

*M*ark and his wife and children had just finished dinner when the doorbell rang. He opened the door and found his two younger brothers standing with open cans of beer in their hands.

“Hey, Mark, How’s it going? There was nothing else to do, so we decided to bring our dates to meet you.”

“Your dates? Give me a break; you’re living with those girls. Besides, I don’t want my children to see the type of lives you guys are leading.”

“The type of lives *we’re* leading,” they laughed. “Okay, Mr. High and Mighty, you’re the one who taught us this lifestyle.” They turned and walked away laughing.

An ashamed Mark walked back into the house and said, “I wish I had been a better example to my brothers when I was younger.”



THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT AND THE OLD TESTAMENT

Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you. (Ex 20: 12)

God has willed that after himself, we are required to honor our parents and all those who have been given authority for our own good.

The command to honor your father and your mother begins the second section of the Ten Commandments, the section that deals with man's relations with his family and fellow humans beings. A person who honors his parents is promised that "your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you" (Ex 20:12). This is the only commandment with a promise and informs us that the Lord gives peace and prosperity to those who keep this command.

Parents have the right to be obeyed and respected. Parents give their lives to rear, protect, and care for their children, making sure family life is stable and safe. The least children can give in return is honor, obedience, love, just assistance, and respect. If love and respect are given in a home, then that family will have the peace and the great prosperity assured by the Lord.

Children should obey their parents for their own welfare. Parents have a better understanding of the world gained from a lifetime of experience. Parents can and will pass on this knowledge to their offspring. If children accept this parental wisdom, they will reap rewards gained from the experience of their parents and lead better, happier lives.

A well-ordered home helps not only the individual family but the entire community as well. The family is the basic unit of society. A healthy family adds to the health of society. Failure to keep the fourth commandment brings great harm to families and ultimately to the community.

The fourth commandment is addressed expressly to children in their relationship to their father and mother, because this relationship is the most universal. It likewise concerns the ties of kinship between members of the extended family. It requires honor, affection, and gratitude toward elders and ancestors. Finally, it extends to the duties of pupils to teachers, employees to employers, subordinates to leaders, citizens to their country, and to those who administer or govern it.

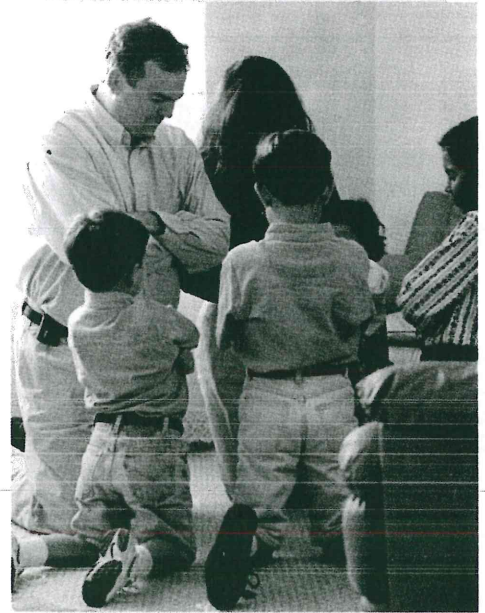
This commandment includes and presupposes the duties of parents, instructors, teachers, leaders, magistrates, those who govern, all who exercise authority over others or over a community of persons. (CCC 2199)

This statement from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* clearly indicates that we have obligations to love, honor, and respect all members of society, in varying degrees, and these obligations must be honored.

THE FIRST FAMILY

Adam and Eve, the original man and woman, were created in a state of marriage. They were the parents of the first family, which existed before any other social or political group. Since the family came before the community in God's wise plan, the family has rights that the community may not deny. Society is not superior to families, nor is it superior to the

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The Holy Family has always been regarded as the model for all Catholic families.

individual. The human person is and should be the principal, subject, and object of every social organization. In other words, social organizations exist for the good of human beings, not human beings for the good of social organizations.

This is not to say that we are commanded to be loyal to our family to the detriment of society. Society benefits from the many rights, duties, and responsibilities of the family. The family owes proper respect and obedience to social and political orders, as implied in the fourth commandment. Fully understood, the fourth commandment tells us to honor God, and after him, our parents and all lawful authority.

Obedience to God's commands is necessary for a just society, and the Book of Genesis is instructive regarding the spread of disobedience in a family leading to corruption in society.

The devil tempted Adam and Eve with the promise that they would be like God if they ate the forbidden fruit. They did the devil's bidding. After they sinned, they rushed to cover their nakedness, for they both realized that they were now capable of taking advantage of each other repeatedly through sin.

They had two sons who bore the mark of original sin: Cain and Abel. When God accepted the offerings of Abel, his brother Cain became jealous. Although God warned Cain that the devil was waiting to tempt him, Cain was overwhelmed by jealousy and killed his brother.

The Bible then relates how men spread over the earth, with each new generation becoming ever more sinful.

In the time of Noah, God decided he had had enough of the sins of mankind. Since Noah was a righteous man, God told Noah to build an ark and take his family into it, for God was planning the destruction of all sinners. Everyone was killed except Noah and his family.

The experiences of these original peoples is a warning to us regarding the spread of sin. When families are corrupt, their actions lead eventually to corruption of community.

JESUS AND THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT

He...was obedient to them. (Lk 2: 51)

The most important lesson we can learn from Jesus concerning the fourth commandment is not something he said. It is the way he lived. We know that we are to learn not only from Jesus' words, but his actions also. This is exactly the case with the fourth commandment.

Jesus chose to live his life on earth as part of a family. In the Holy Family was a mother, the Virgin Mary, whom Jesus loved and who loved Jesus as a true mother. There was St. Joseph, the protector and provider for the family, a loving foster father for the Christ child and chaste spouse of the Virgin Mary. And finally there was Jesus himself, who, though he was God, obeyed and loved his parents, knowing that this was proper.

[T]he Holy Family has always been regarded as the exemplar and model for all Catholic families and, by extension, as the exemplar of all persons living in community, whether active or contemplative: the loving faith,

obedience and providence of the hard-working Joseph; the faith, love, obedience and strength of the Blessed Mother; the perfection of the Son of God made Man, Who submitted Himself in obedience to a human mother and foster father. Thus in the earthly trinity of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph can be found a perfect model of all the virtues, both personal and social. But not only were they holy, saintly and virtuous, they also lived a human life like ours which makes it possible for us to seek to imitate them and their virtues.¹

It is easier for us to learn from the Holy Family once we realize that they lived very normally for most of Jesus' first thirty years. Joseph worked as a carpenter to support his family. When Jesus was a child, he probably had friends that he spent time with when he wasn't called on for help by Mary. Later, Jesus himself learned the trade of carpentry from his foster father Joseph. What makes this family an example for all families, though, is the dedication with which they filled their roles. They realized that God had a special plan for them as a family that required the individual members to fill certain roles. We must realize that God has a plan for us and our families and that each of us must play our own role in that plan.

WHAT RELATIONSHIPS DOES THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT ADDRESS?

Since God instituted the human family and directed how it should operate, his wishes must be followed in all matters that relate to the family. While all have equal dignity and by right are to be treated as children of God, different members of the family have different functions.

As the originators of our life and the caretakers of our youth, parents have a most demanding role to play. Though the same original sin that afflicts us afflicts them, parents are called upon to do their best to lead us in pursuit of our goal in life: heaven. Parenting is a humbling experience, for it calls upon both mother and father to sacrifice themselves to a large extent for the good of the children, over and above their own desires and plans.

It is indeed fitting that the fourth commandment be spoken of in terms of the parents first—for it is in the home that most of us begin life and first experience our obligation to others. It is the first school of self-sacrifice. For parents, this sacrifice entails their primary responsibility for the children's education in faith, prayer, and the virtues, as well as for care of their children's physical and spiritual needs. Those who do not learn respect, love, and honor for their parents, who are of their own blood, will hardly be willing to show respect and obedience to others outside their family.

We are, in fact, required to respect other people besides our parents. The fourth commandment relates not only to parents and children but also to others within the same family. All family members are called to render a debt of kinship, respect, honor, gratitude, and affection for one another, elders, and ancestors.

Beyond fulfilling one's obligations to family, obeying the fourth commandment prepares one to enter society. The obedience and respect required



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by the fourth commandment is owed to teachers, leaders, lawgivers, those who govern, and those who administer the law, as well as to all just laws of themselves. Simply stated, the fourth commandment binds us to accept all the just commands of lawful authority and the laws of the community of persons in which we reside, both local and national. A lawful authority is any person who by relation or circumstance has the right to tell us what to do.

OBLIGATIONS OF THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT

The well-being of the individual person and of both human and Christian society is closely bound up with the healthy state of conjugal and family life.²

God instituted the family for the good of the spouses—two people dedicated to the salvation of each other—and the procreation and education of children to populate heaven. Obviously, the familial relationship joins members in deeply personal relationships with moral obligations set by God. The fourth commandment is meant to protect those relationships.

Since the family is by its nature hierarchical, its members have certain roles to fill.

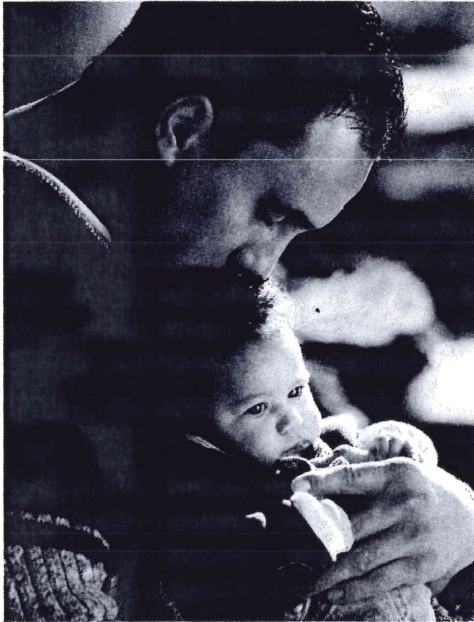
The father, as head of the domestic church, has a most serious obligation to demonstrate a concerned love for his spouse and his children. He must respect the rights and see to the obligations of his wife and children, particularly in matters of religious belief and practice.

As the heart of the family, the mother has an obligation to counsel and support her husband in his worship of God and in his decisions. She too must be an example of love, and, when necessary, a mediator between the father and the children to avoid misunderstandings.

Together, parents have the primary right to educate their children in the faith—a right that must not be taken from them. This right includes the power to determine the choice of schools best suited to the spiritual and mental needs of the children. Since this is such an important job, parents are not asked to do this alone, but are given the grace of the Sacrament of Matrimony, which empowers them to evangelize their children.

Educating children in the faith should be begun as soon as the children are old enough to say prayers—for the family is the first place in which prayer should be taught. Young children should be taken to church at an early age on appropriate occasions as part of their evangelization. Evangelization begins with prayer and simple stories of Jesus, Mary, and the lives of the saints. Parents are obliged to respect and encourage their children's vocations in life and teach that each child is called personally to follow Jesus.

It is obvious that parenting is a job that requires a couple to give not just a few hours a day but their entire lives. Because of the personal sacrifices parents make for their children, God requires that children show love, respect, gratitude, and just obedience, and that they render assistance to those who gave them life. A child who treats his parents well will make his own life and his parents' lives easier.



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There are many concrete things children should do to live out these obligations: obey the lawful commands of parents when they are given, help with the family chores or clean one's room, avoid friends the parents don't approve of, and keep the curfew set by parents.

In families with more than one child, these obligations become even more pressing. Older children must keep in mind that their younger siblings are an impressionable audience who are carefully observing their conduct. When older children sin, they endanger not only their own souls but also the souls of their younger brothers and sisters. If older children disobey their parents or brag about sinful actions, they become occasions of sin to their younger brothers and sisters. Many young children, in fact, are introduced to serious sin by the words and actions of older siblings. We must remember that, since the family is the first school of self-sacrifice, family members must care for each other in both physical and spiritual needs.

Some young people, however, do not wish to talk to an adult when a sibling or a friend is committing serious sin. This is avoided out of a warped sense of loyalty and a desire not to get someone in trouble. Inaction, however, often allows serious sins such as theft, drug abuse, use of pornography, or sexual activity outside of marriage to become habits, which are difficult to break [see *concupiscence* in the vocabulary section of Chapter 9].

When we become aware of such actions by our siblings or friends, we are seriously obligated to seek the assistance of a parent, priest, or other responsible adult before permanent harm is done. The details of the individual's problem should be told honestly; we should not attempt to sugarcoat the truth. One of the reasons that the Church recommends frequent Reconciliation is that it presents an opportunity to discuss difficult moral problems.

In addition to caring for the spiritual health of our siblings, we can contribute to the personal sanctity of our parents through prayer and through making family life easier by quickly forgiving those in our family who offend us. Simply put, a peace-filled home is a happy home.

Children eventually leave their parents' home and begin a life apart from the day-to-day care and structure provided by their mother and father. But leaving home does not free children from the obligation to listen to and seriously consider the advice of parents or to care for their parents when they are in need. Family members should willingly assume the obligation to care for each other, the old and the sick, as well as those who are poor and handicapped.

Finally, one must remember that the family is not restricted to the relationships between parents, brothers, and sisters. The family comprises other members as well, including cousins, aunts and uncles, and in-laws. We must also recognize members of the Church as family, and even the whole of the human race. All must be esteemed before God, for we are all his children. The care we provide to our immediate family, then, is owed to all others in need, including the old, the sick, the poor, and the handicapped.



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We should be able to look back on our lives and see what our good example accomplished.

SANCTIFICATION OF SOCIAL LIFE

We are all called to live our day-to-day lives in a holy manner. This can be difficult in the modern world. More than one person has compared the current state of the culture to the Roman Empire when paganism ruled. It is no secret that many people in these times, as in Rome at its lowest point, plan their parties around sex, alcohol, and drugs.

Many of us might feel it is not our obligation to speak up when others plan parties organized around sinful actions. This do-nothing attitude is shortsighted for many reasons. First of all, such events are planned occasions of sin that can lead people into immoral conduct and should therefore be avoided. The person who ignores that fact is not being straightforward with himself or with God. Secondly, friendships that develop out of these activities are likely based on these sins, and again could only be damaging to the soul. Thirdly, if we fail to discourage our friends from attending events that could harm their souls and endanger their salvation, we are not acting with the care that true friends should demonstrate. (It is true that some young people feel they will live forever and will try anything, but we all know, deep down, that none of us will live forever.) Finally, if we do not encourage our friends to be good people, it will be difficult to find good friends with whom to associate.

We should not live as Mark did in the story that opened this chapter. Instead, we should be able to look back on our lives and see what our good example accomplished.

OBLIGATIONS OF CIVIL AUTHORITIES

The first true community, as we have seen, is the family, the basis of all other social structures. These social structures are good because they provide man with the opportunity to have the stability and comforts that a community can provide.

As part of his plan, God decided that there should be political communities and public authorities, both of which he has based on human nature—for man needs a system through which he can accomplish his goals.

Because God wanted these institutions, the people who hold positions of power in them will answer to God for their actions on the day of judgment. They have a most grave obligation to respect the fundamental rights of the human person and to care for the common good by promoting and strengthening marriage, safeguarding public morality, and advancing public virtue and prosperity. In short, civil leaders are obliged to see that their society treats the things that are most sacred properly. This foundation is, after all, for the good of the community. Those societies that are not based on the Gospel easily become tyrannical and substitute the whims of man for the law of God.

One of the primary obligations of the political community is to respect the fundamental rights of each person, to honor the family, and to give the family any needed assistance. These obligations require that political authority ensure:

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- † The freedom to establish a family, have children, and bring them up in keeping with the family's own moral and religious convictions;
- † The protection and stability of the marriage bond and the institution of the family;
- † The freedom to profess one's faith, to hand it on, and to rear one's children in it, with the necessary means and institutions;
- † The rights to private property, free enterprise, work, housing, and emigration;
- † In keeping with the country's institutions, the right to medical care, assistance for the aged, and family benefits;
- † The protection of security and health, particularly with respect to dangers like drugs, pornography, alcoholism, etc.;
- † The freedom to form associations with other families and so to have representation before civil authority.

OBLIGATIONS OF CITIZENS

Just as a government has responsibilities it must fulfill for the good of its citizens, citizens have responsibilities toward their government. Citizens are required to love their country and contribute to the good of society in a spirit of truth, justice, solidarity, and freedom.

Our country is part of the heritage God has given us, so we should love and serve it in gratitude, recognizing this love and service as an obligation. Service to our country is manifested in building up society in a spirit of truth, justice, solidarity, and freedom.

The dignity of the human person requires that all members of society should pursue the common good, that is, the sum total of social conditions that allow people either as individuals or groups to reach their potential more fully and easily. Submission to legitimate authority and service for the common good in matters of taxation, voting, and military duties is required.

Although laws are ideally expressions of morality, this is not always the case. Sometimes societies establish laws that are contrary to the common good. We must be careful not to accept such laws. Citizens cannot follow directions from authority that are immoral, contrary to the rights of persons and the teachings of the Gospel. In the words of St. Peter, "we must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5: 29). Examples of such laws are those permitting abortion, the sale of contraceptives, and pornography, and laws promoting divorce. It is the responsibility of citizens to work within legal structures to change immoral laws.

CONCLUSION

The first social group God created was the family, which, like all groups, needs a structure. God deemed that parents, who are responsible for caring for and educating their children, should have the love, respect, and obedience of these same children. When children give their parents this

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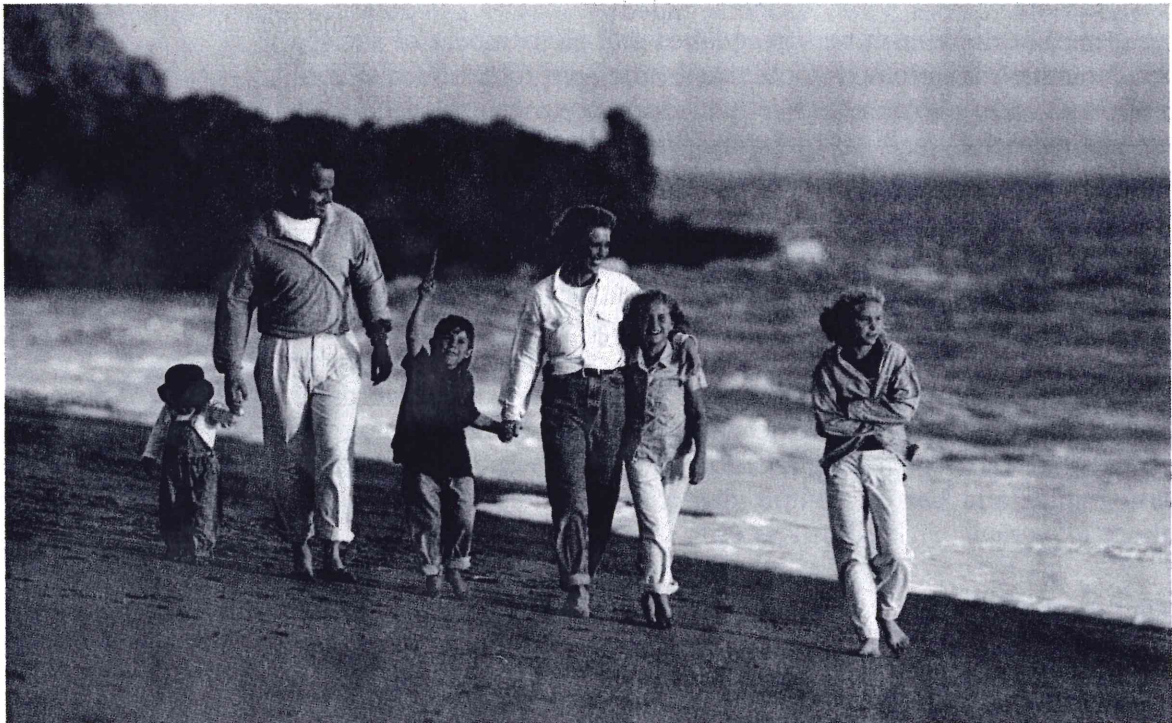
At work within it is the power and strength of God himself.

respect, the entire family benefits from a happy and stable home life. In addition to owing their parents respect and obedience, children are responsible for the example they give to one another, especially to their younger siblings.

The fourth commandment speaks explicitly of the honor owed by children to parents and implies the obedience owed to authority figures in larger social and political structures. The existence of political authority has its origin in God; hence political structures should be designed with God's laws in mind. Societies serve man best when they assist him to save his soul. Such societies can exist only where there is a vision of man based on the Gospels and respect for the rights of all members of society. Societies not based on the Gospels easily turn into ruthless totalitarian structures.

Love is true when it creates the good of persons and of communities; it creates the good and gives it to others. Only one who is able to be demanding with himself in the name of love can give love to others. Love is demanding. It makes demands in all human situations. It is even more demanding to those who are open to the Gospel. Is this not what Christ proclaims in his commandment?

Nowadays, people need to discover this demanding love, for it is truly the foundation of the family, a foundation able to "endure all things." At work within it is the power and strength of God himself, who "is love" at work; also, within it is the power and strength of Christ, the Redeemer of man and the "Savior of the world."³



The Fourth Commandment

Chapter 22 Study Guide

SUPPLEMENTARY READING

Beginning with the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, Christianity has made the family its center. While the father is often said to be the head, the mother is most definitely the *heart*. It is the mother of the family who possesses what John Paul II calls the “feminine genius,” the natural ability to show great warmth and love for others.

Consider for a moment what it must be like then for the parents of a good Christian woman to give her in marriage to a violent unfaithful pagan. Not only this, but also to have her live with his mother who, with the help of gossipy, disobedient servants, continually tried to undermine her authority and spread lies about her. On top of this, imagine if the first of her three children were to follow his father into lying, cheating, robbery, and sex outside of marriage. So far, there does not appear to be much hope for this family.

Yet St. Monica knew that all things were possible with the love of Jesus Christ. First, by persevering through all the unfounded gossip of her servants with meekness and patience, she was able to convert her mother-in-law. With even more time, her husband began to profess Christianity and died a fervent baptized Christian. Her son however, was much tougher to reach.

While away at school, he applied himself to his studies with zeal. Yet he had also taken on a mistress and had a son with her. He even fell so far as to renounce Christianity for Manicheism—a heresy that denied all religious authority and individual responsibility for sins. Monica was heartbroken and went crying to her spiritual director the bishop. He consoled her saying, “Take comfort; the child of such tears can never perish.”

After studying philosophy in Rome, her son Augustine finally gave up his Manichean beliefs and entered into a great depression. Aware of her son’s distress, Monica sold all she had and went to Rome. There, she finally convinced his mistress of seventeen years to release him and the young man began to study the Scriptures.



St. Monica

(332-387)

Feast on August 27

Patroness of Wives and Mothers

He became convinced that Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, but hesitated to accept the disciplined life of a Christian. Finally, while reading the epistles of St. Paul one day, Augustine was moved to grief for his sins and threw himself into the outstretched arms of his mother. Soon after, he and his son began to prepare for Baptism with the help of Monica.

St. Monica is a wonderful example of the principle of spiritual multiplication. She poured herself out completely to those around her, but most of all to her eldest son. Besides converting her mother-in-law and husband and raising her two younger children to be good Christians, her daily tears and prayers led to the conversion of St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo and Doctor of the Church. Augustine is believed to be responsible for thousands of conversions throughout the course of his life and many more from his writings (most notably, *Confessions*, his story from darkness to light). The Church owes a great debt to St. Monica for her motherly care of one of the most brilliant Christian philosophers the world has ever known.

VOCABULARY

CIVIL AUTHORITY

Person or group who governs or controls a certain group of private citizens or a nation.

COMMUNITY

A group of persons who share the same beliefs, live together under authority, and cooperate in pursuing common interests for the good of other people besides their own members.

HERITAGE

That which comes from the circumstances of birth; an inherited lot or portion.

LOYALTY

Faithful adherence to one's promise, oath, word of honor, etc.

OBLIGATION

The moral power of a law commanding obedience; moral necessity imposed on free will.

RESPECT

To esteem, prize, or value a person (or thing).

SELF-SACRIFICE

The giving up of one's own interests, happiness, and desires for the sake of duty or the welfare of others.

SOCIALIZATION

Creation of voluntary associations and institutions which relate to economic and social goals, to cultural and recreational activities, to sport, to various professions, and to political affairs.

SOLIDARITY

Also the principle of "friendship" or "social charity"; manifested first in the distribution of goods and the remuneration of work.

WELFARE

Well-being of the members of a group or community usually provided by legislation or social effort.



STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the message behind the story that opens the chapter?
2. Who benefits when the fourth commandment is kept?
3. What is the effect on society when the commandments are obeyed?
4. What effect did the first sin have on Adam and Eve? How does this apply to us?
5. Why is the Holy Family the model for all families?
6. Why is the home called the “first school of self-sacrifice”?
7. Who has the primary responsibility for the education of children in a family?
8. What are the two purposes of matrimony?
9. What are the roles of the father of a family? The mother?
10. What obligations do parents have toward children in relation to religious practice?
11. What obligations do children have toward parents?
12. What obligations do older children have in regard to younger siblings?
13. What obligations are owed to extended family members?
14. List four reasons to sanctify the social life.
15. Who is the principal subject and object of every social organization?
16. What obligations are owed to the government by its citizens?

PRACTICAL EXERCISES

1. Explain the meaning of this text from Vatican II: “The well-being of the individual person and of both human and Christian society is intimately linked with the healthy condition of that community produced by marriage and family.” (*GS*, 47).
2. Discuss some of the material benefits possessed by families in this country and the positive and negative effects that they may have on family life. Do you think family life in countries that do not enjoy as many material benefits as ours is generally better, or do you think that things are generally the same everywhere? Support your answer with specific examples.
3. Comment on the following situation, evaluating Pat’s attitude, actions, or decisions in light of the fourth commandment: Pat was told by his dad that it’s all right if he drinks beer at home once in a while. Pat told his buddies, “I am going to get a fake I.D. since my dad says it’s all right to drink.”
4. Make a list of actions that children can do to make their parents’ lives easier.
5. What can be done to sanctify social life during the school day?
 - a. During the lunch period
 - b. During passing periods
 - c. Outside after school

FROM THE CATECHISM

2247 “Honor your father and your mother” (Dt 5:16; Mk 7:10).

2248 According to the fourth commandment, God has willed that, after him, we should honor our parents and those whom he has vested with authority for our good.

2249 The conjugal community is established upon the covenant and consent of the spouses. Marriage and family are ordered to the good of the spouses, to the procreation and the education of children.

2250 “The well-being of the individual person and of both human and Christian society is closely bound up with the healthy state of conjugal and family life” (GS, 47 § 1).

2251 Children owe their parents respect, gratitude, just obedience, and assistance. Filial respect fosters harmony in all of family life.

2252 Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children in the faith, prayer, and all the virtues. They have the duty to provide as far as possible for the physical and spiritual needs of their children.

2253 Parents should respect and encourage their children’s vocations. They should remember and teach that the first calling of the Christian is to follow Jesus.

2254 Public authority is obliged to respect the fundamental rights of the human person and the conditions for the exercise of his freedom.

2255 It is the duty of citizens to work with civil authority for building up society in a spirit of truth; justice, solidarity, and freedom.

2256 Citizens are obliged in conscience not to follow the directives of civil authorities when they are contrary to the demands of the moral order. “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

2257 Every society’s judgments and conduct reflect a vision of man and his destiny. Without the light the Gospel sheds on God and man, societies easily become totalitarian.

Endnotes

1. *Our Sunday Visitor’s Catholic Encyclopedia*, pp. 497-498.
2. *GS*, 47 § 1.
3. *FC*, 14.