



## **THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT**

***“Honour your father and your mother”***

**Texts from the  
*Catechism of the Catholic Church***

### **THE SECOND TABLE OF THE DECALOGUE**

***“You shall love your neighbour as yourself”***

*“Jesus said to his disciples: ‘Love one another even as I have loved you.’” (Jn 13:34.)*

In response to the question about the first of the commandments, Jesus says: “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength’. The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself’. There is no other commandment greater than these.” (Mk 12:29-31) (2196)

### **THE MEANING OF THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT**

*“Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the LORD your God gives you.” (Ex 20:12; Dt. 5:16.) “He was obedient to them.” (Lk 2:51) The Apostle teaches: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honour your father and mother’, (this is the first commandment with a promise) ‘that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth’.” (Eph 6:1-3; cf. Dt 5:16)*

The fourth commandment opens the second table of the Decalogue. It shows us the order of charity. God has willed that, after him, we should honour our parents to whom we owe life and who have handed on to us the knowledge of God. We are obliged to honour and respect all those whom God, for our good, has vested with his authority. (2197)

This commandment is expressed in positive terms of duties to be fulfilled. It introduces the subsequent commandments which are concerned with particular respect for life, marriage, earthly goods, and speech. Respecting this commandment provides, along with spiritual fruits, temporal fruits of peace and prosperity. Conversely, failure to observe it brings great harm to communities and to individuals. (2198) (2200)

*The fourth commandment is addressed expressly to:*

- \* Children in their relationship to their father and mother,
- \* The ties of kinship between members of the extended family.
- \* It requires honour, affection and gratitude toward elders and ancestors.
- \* The duties of pupils to teachers, employees to employers, subordinates to leaders,
- \* Citizens to their country and to those who administer or govern it.
- \* It presupposes the duties of parents, instructors, teachers, leaders, magistrates, those who govern, all who exercise authority over others or over a community of persons. (2199)

### **THE FAMILY IN GOD'S PLAN**

#### ***The nature of the family***

The conjugal community is established upon the consent of the spouses. Marriage and the family are ordered to the good of the spouses and to the procreation and education of children. The love of the spouses and the begetting of children create among members of the same family personal relationships and primordial responsibilities. (2201)

A man and a woman united in marriage, together with their children, form a family. This institution is prior to any recognition by public authority, which has an obligation to recognize it. It should be considered the normal reference point by which the different forms of family relationship are to be evaluated. (2202)

In creating man and woman, God instituted the human family and endowed it with its fundamental constitution. For the common good of its members and of society, the family necessarily has manifold responsibilities, rights and duties. (2203)

#### ***The Christian family***

The Christian family constitutes a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion, and for this reason it can and should be called a *domestic church*. It is a community of faith, hope and charity; it assumes singular importance in the Church. The Christian family is a communion of persons, a sign and image of the communion of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit. In the procreation and education of children it reflects the Father's work of creation. It is called to partake of the prayer and sacrifice of Christ. Daily prayer and the reading of the Word of God strengthen it in charity. The Christian family has an evangelising and missionary task. (2204- 2205)

#### ***The family and society***

The family is *the original cell of social life*. It is the natural society in which husband and wife are called to give themselves in love and in the gift of life. Authority, stability and a life of relationships within the family constitute the foundations for freedom, security and fraternity within society. (2207)

The family should live in such a way that its members learn to care and take responsibility for the young, the old, the sick, the handicapped, and the poor: “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.” (Jas 1:27) (2208)

The fourth commandment *illuminates other relationships in society*. In our brothers and sisters we see the children of our parents; in our cousins, the descendants of our ancestors; in our fellow citizens, the children of our country; in the baptized, the children of our mother the Church; in every human person, a son or daughter of the One who wants to be called ‘our Father’. (2212)

#### ***The duties of children***

The divine fatherhood is the source of human fatherhood; this is the foundation of the honour owed to parents. The respect of children, whether minors or adults, for their father and mother is nourished by the natural affection born of the bond uniting them. Respect for parents (*filial piety*) derives from *gratitude* toward those who, by the gift of life, their love and their work, have brought their children into the world and enabled them to grow in stature, wisdom and grace. (2214-2215)

Filial respect is shown by:

- \* True docility and *obedience* to respect their parents.
- \* Obedience toward parents ceases with the emancipation of the children; not so respect, which is always owed to them. (2217)
- \* Grown children show their *responsibilities toward their parents*, giving them material and moral support in old age and in times of illness, loneliness or distress. (2218)
- \* It also concerns *relationships between brothers and sisters*. (2219)
- \* For Christians a special gratitude is due to those from whom they have received the gift of faith, the grace of Baptism and life in the Church. These may include parents, grandparents, other members of the family, pastors, catechists, and other teachers or friends. (2220)

### ***The duties of parents***

The fecundity of conjugal love cannot be reduced solely to the procreation of children, but must extend to their moral education and their spiritual formation. *The role of parents in education* is of such importance that it is almost impossible to provide an adequate substitute. (2221)

The duties of parents to their children are:

- \* To regard their children as *children of God* educating them to fulfil God's law. (2222)
- \* To educate them in the virtues, an apprenticeship in self-denial, sound judgement.
- \* To give good example to their children. (2223)
- \* The responsibility and privilege of *evangelising their children* arising from the grace of matrimony
- \* To initiate their children at an early age into the mysteries of the faith of which they are the 'first heralds' for their children. Parents have the mission of teaching their children to pray and to discover their vocation as children of God. The parish is the Eucharistic community and the heart of the liturgical life of Christian families; it is a privileged place for the catechesis of children and parents. (2225 – 2226)
- \* Providing for their children's *physical and spiritual needs*. (2228)
- \* Parents have the *right to choose a school* for them which corresponds to their own convictions, the duty of choosing schools that will best help them in their task as Christian educators. (2229)
- \* When they become adults, children have the right and duty to *choose their profession and state of life*. (2230)
- \* Parents must be convinced that the first vocation of the Christian is to *follow Jesus*. Becoming a disciple of Jesus means accepting the invitation to belong to *God's family*, to live in conformity with His way of life: "For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother." (Mt 12:49)
- \* Parents should welcome and respect with joy and thanksgiving the Lord's call to one of their children to follow him in virginity for the sake of the Kingdom in the consecrated life or in priestly ministry. (2232-2233)

## **THE AUTHORITIES IN CIVIL SOCIETY**

### ***Duties of civil authorities***

God's fourth commandment also enjoins us to honour all who for our good have received authority in society from God. It clarifies the duties of those who exercise authority as well as those who benefit from it. Those who exercise authority should do so as a service. The exercise of authority is measured morally in terms of its divine origin, its reasonable nature and its specific object. No one can command or establish what is contrary to the dignity of persons and the natural law. (2234-5)

*Political authorities* are obliged to respect the fundamental rights of the human person. They will dispense justice humanely by respecting the rights of everyone, especially of families and the disadvantaged. (2237)

### ***The duties of citizens***

Those subject to authority should regard those in authority as representatives of God, who has made them stewards of his gifts: "Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution... Live as free men, yet without using your freedom as a pretext for evil; but live as servants of God." (1 Pt 2:13, 16) (2238)

It is the *duty of citizens* to contribute along with the civil authorities to the good of society in a spirit of truth, justice, solidarity and freedom. Submission to authority and co-responsibility for the common good make it morally obligatory to pay taxes, to exercise the right to vote, and to defend one's country. (2239) (2242)

The citizen is obliged in conscience not to follow the directives of civil authorities when they are contrary to the demands of the moral order. *Refusing obedience* to civil authorities finds its justification in the distinction between serving God and serving the political community. "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." (Mt 22:21)

### ***The political community and the Church***

Every institution is inspired, at least implicitly, by a vision of man and his destiny, from which it derives the point of reference for its judgement, its hierarchy of values, its line of conduct. Most societies have formed their institutions in the recognition of a certain pre-eminence of man over things. Only the divinely revealed religion has clearly recognized man's origin and destiny in God, the Creator and Redeemer. The Church invites political authorities to measure their judgements and decisions against this inspired truth about God and man. (2244)

The Church, because of her commission and competence, is not to be confused in any way with the political community. She is both the sign and the safeguard of the transcendent character of the human person. The Church respects and encourages the political freedom and responsibility of the citizen. (2245)

It is a part of the Church's mission to pass moral judgements even in matters related to politics, whenever the fundamental rights of man or the salvation of souls requires it. The only means, she may use are those which are in accord with the Gospel and the welfare of all men according to the diversity of times and circumstances. (2246)

## **IN BRIEF**

**"Honour your father and your mother" (Dt 5:16; Mk 7:10). (2247)**

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

**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. (2249)**

**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. (2250)**

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

**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. (2252)**

**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. (2253)**

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

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

**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). (2256)**

**Every society's judgements and conduct reflect a vision of man and his destiny. Without the light the Gospel sheds on God and man, societies easily become totalitarian. (2257)**