

Honoring father and mother means praying for them



Question: How am I supposed to honor my father and mother who so mistreated me? I have a lot to argue with God over in this commandment. Why should I have to honor the likes of them?

– Name withheld, New Jersey

Answer: There certainly remain situations where children will find it difficult to honor their father and mother. There may even be times when it is immoral to obey a parent who instructs a child to do something wicked or wrong. God must always be obeyed, first and foremost.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, commenting on the Fourth Commandment to honor our father and mother, speaks to the duties of parents as well, and devoted 10 paragraphs to this. Here is a summary: “Parents must regard their children as children of God and respect them as human persons. Showing themselves obedient to the will of the Father in heaven, they educate their children to fulfill God’s law. ... They bear witness to this responsibility first by creating a home where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and disinterested service ... self-denial, sound judgment, and self-mastery are learned. ... Parents have a grave responsibility to give good example to their children. By knowing how to acknowledge their own failings to their children, parents will be better able to guide and correct them. ... Parents should teach children to avoid the compromising and degrading influences which threaten human societies. ... [P]arents receive the responsibility and privilege of evangelizing their children. Parents should initiate their children at an early age into the mysteries of the faith of which they are the ‘first heralds’ for their

children. They should associate them from their tenderest years with the life of the Church. ... Parents' respect and affection are expressed by the care and attention they devote to bringing up their young children and providing for their physical and spiritual needs. As the children grow up, the same respect and devotion lead parents to educate them in the right use of their reason and freedom. As far as possible parents have the duty of choosing schools that will best help them in their task as Christian educators" (CCC Nos. 2222-2229).

It is in the context of the fulfillment of these duties that honor and respect for parents finds its fullest meaning. Honor for one's parents ought not be experienced as a burden but as a joy and the fruit of thankfulness and mutual affection.

To be sure, no one has perfect parents, but to honor and – especially as youths – obey them remains the norm. There will be rare occasions when they must not be obeyed, but the commandment speaks to the ordinary and usual circumstances.

Finally, I have edited your question, which contained some personal and painful descriptions of your youth wherein your parents acted in ways contrary to the dignity of being parents and adults. However, you went so far as to use profanity in regard to them. I would caution that, even in the case of misbehaving parents, we should not resort to such things. Your parents, perhaps due especially to their shortcomings, need your prayers. Even in situations where there is little to praise and where we cannot reasonably interact with parents or family members, we fulfill the Fourth Commandment by praying especially for them, for their conversion and spiritual well-being. Do not permit their shortcomings to have you come up short in your own duties to pray for your persecutors and those who have mistreated you.

Demons and sin

Question: I have heard that when we confess any sin, demons are no longer aware of it. Is this true?

– **Peter Tate**, Long Beach, California

Answer: The world of demons is murky, and we don't have all the answers to questions like this. However, while it seems likely that demons cannot overhear our confessions (because it is a sacrament and God protects our privacy), it does not follow that demons can have no memory of sins we have committed in the past, even if later confessed. It is widely reported among exorcists that demons do refer to the past sins of the exorcist or others present in the exorcism. Sometimes these are just calumnious lies, but other times they are accurate.

To be sure, demons are not omniscient and cannot read our minds, but they have a wide network of observers among them who can, and it would seem do, remember and report the deeds of our past. The very name "Satan" means "accuser." This presupposes some memory of our past sins.

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