

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We're looking at the fourth commandment this week:

Honor your father and mother.

Remember that Jesus pointed out the two greatest commandments: "You shall love the Lord your God... you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37, 39). Here we begin focusing on the second great commandment. After God, we are to "honor our parents to whom we owe life" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC] 2197).

As I mentioned in my homily last weekend, this commandment was given to adults, not just to kids. Each of us is a child to someone, and so this is a universal commandment. We're called to respect and honor those in rightful authority over us. Of course, for minor children means obedience to their parents:

As long as a child lives at home with his parents, the child should obey his parents in all that they ask of him when it is for his good or that of the family. (CCC 2217)

The fourth commandment reminds us that even grown children still have responsibilities to their parents. We are to honor them and respect them throughout their lives, even should they not be the "best of parents"... after all, they gave us the great gift of life! As our parents grow older and need more support, we have the responsibility to make sure they have proper care and support. After my grandmother died, there came a time when my grandfather could no longer care for himself. It was decided that he needed the care of a nursing home. It was beautiful to see how much company he got, as many of his children and grandchildren would visit him weekly (each on different days), and others less frequently, but still regularly (he had ten children, and many, many grandchildren!). I can't tell you how it wounded my heart, though, when my mother told me that the man in the next room never had any visitors. His children almost never came to see him. After a lifetime of supporting and caring for his children, he was left alone... abandoned, as it were. Ugh! Oh, how this loneliness must grieve the Heart of Jesus! Even when we are grown, we have a responsibility to our parents.

The fourth commandment extends beyond just our parents, though. It is a call to honor and respect all rightful authority. This commandment "clarifies the duties of those who exercise authority as well as those who benefit from it" (CCC 2234). The *Catechism*, following from the example and teaching of Jesus, makes it clear that all authority is about service. Whether this authority is in the home, the work place, or political authority, authority is not about grabbing power, but a duty to serve those over whom they exercise authority. This means, of course, that all authority on earth is limited, for "no one can command ... what is contrary to the dignity of persons and the natural law" (CCC 2235). When looking at civil authority, it means that our civic leaders have a responsibility to make sure that the laws they form are "just" laws (not unjust), and that they must respect the fundamental rights of the human person as seen in our very nature (natural law).

As citizens, we have the duty to obey proper authority. St. Peter says, "Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution" (I Peter 2:13). The civil government has lawful authority over the laws of the land (yes, including traffic laws, like speed limits!), and so God expects us to honor and obey these laws. I know, I know, you don't want to hear this, but paying taxes is part of our duty as Christians... not just as citizens of the United States.

Remember, however, that this obedience is not absolute. There are times when we have not only the right, but the duty to disobey civic authorities – in those times when the laws are unjust.

The citizen is obliged in conscience not to follow the direction of civil authorities when they are contrary to the demands of the moral order, to the fundamental rights of persons or the teachings of the Gospel. *Refusing obedience* to civil authorities, when their demands are contrary to those of an upright conscience, finds its justification in the distinction between serving God and serving the political community. (CCC 2242)

Think about Martin Luther King, Jr. or Rosa Parks. There are times we *must* stand up to unjust authority.

Over all, though, we are called to honor, respect and obey proper authority – even if we don't like them, even if we disagree with them. Let us pray that we see how we are called to live out the fourth commandment more practically in our lives.