

**CONTEMPLATIONS ON THE TEN  
COMMANDMENTS**

**VOLUME 2  
THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT**

***(Honor Your Father & Your Mother)***

**BY  
H.H. POPE SHENOUDA III**



**COPTIC ORTHODOX  
PATRIARCHATE**



*See of St. Mark*

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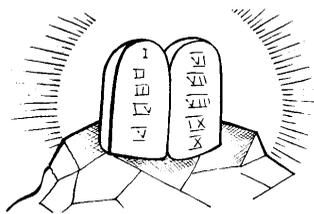
## PREFACE

**The Ten Commandments were not meant for the times of the prophet Moses nor the times of the Old Testament, but were rather addressed to every generation, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law (Matt. 5:18).**

Through Christianity, the Ten Commandments were given a new meaning which coincided with the new standards understood by the believers in the New Testament. So the Commandments remain the same but their concept widens as God grants with His grace an opportunity for meditation. How true then was the prophet David when he said, *"I have seen the consummation of all perfection, But Your commandment is exceedingly broad."* (Ps. 119:96).

This series of lectures were given in 1967 and have been published more than once.

**Shenouda III**



## THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

*"Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you." (Ex. 20:12).*

*"Honour your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, that your days may be long, and that it may be well with you in the land which the LORD your God is giving you." (Deut. 5:16).*



## **CHAPTER 1**

### **NATURAL FATHERHOOD AND RESPECT FOR OLDER RELATIVES**

#### **Literal Meaning of the Commandment**

This Fifth Commandment, in its literal, primitive, and original meaning, before acquiring a broader human understanding and before attaining its full Christian application, was meant to honour the natural parents.

#### **Its Broad Meaning and Concept**

Subsequently, the meaning extended to include blood relatives who are of the same level of the father and the mother such as uncles and aunts. Later, it included the elders who are by virtue of their age as the father and the mother.

Still later, the meaning broadened to include spiritual fatherhood and became applicable to those who take care of our spiritual needs and our minds, such as priests and teachers as well as those in authoritative positions and those who are under our care.

In this chapter, we will talk about natural fatherhood, although this discussion will also lay down rules applicable to other forms of fatherhood.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS COMMANDMENT

This Commandment derives its importance from the following factors:

### 1. The first Commandment concerning human relations

This particular Commandment honouring the parents is found to occupy the top place on the second tablet and preceding the Lord's saying: "*Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, etc.*" This arrangement gives us an idea about the seriousness of this Commandment which the Lord made first among those concerning human relations.

**In order to give us a deeper understanding of honouring the parents, the Lord says, "Honour your father and your mother" before He says, "do not murder" and before He says, "do not commit adultery", and before He says, "do not steal", "do not lie" and "do not covet".** It is as if whoever sins by not honouring his parents is more sinful than whoever commits murder or adultery or steals, or more sinful than whoever bears false witness or covets his neighbour's belongings.

The Lord has, therefore, put this Commandment up front so as not to take it lightly. Many would tremble to crimes of murder and say 'God forbids that I would ever kill. I am not a criminal'. However, God said, "*Honour your father and your mother*" before He said, "*do not commit murder*". In this way, God revealed to us the magnitude of the crime one commits if one does not honour one's parents.

## **2. It is the First Commandment Associated with a reward**

*"Honour your father and mother which is the first Commandment with a promise"* said St. Paul the Apostle in Ephesians 6:2 And what promise did the Lord give to whoever honours their parents? It is a dual blessing:

*"That it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth."* (Eph. 6: 3, De. 5:16).

**The opposite is also true. For whoever does not honour their parents, reaps the opposite; their days become few and unpleasant.**

Take Jacob the father of fathers, who took advantage of his father's blindness and misled him, and cunningly received his blessing, we see him demonstrate the validity of this rule when he said to Pharaoh : *"few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers."*(Gen. 47: 9).

Undoubtedly, this leads us to another point which emphasises the importance of this Commandment, that is, the death penalty for whoever breaks it.

## **3. Dishonouring parents was punishable by death and cursing**

Death was the punishment for breaking this Commandment.

About this, the Law said: *"He who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death... and he who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death."* (Ex. 21:15-17). This strict punishment is emphasised by the Lord when he says in another place, *"For everyone who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death. He has cursed his father or his mother. His blood shall be upon him."* (Lev. 20:9).

And, perhaps, to these Commandments pointed the Lord Jesus as He said to the scribes and Pharisees, *"For Moses said, 'Honour your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.'"* (Mark 7:10).

The father and the mother are, therefore, not ordinary people. For if a person cursed ordinary people, he would not be put to death but would rather stand before the synod and the matter could be resolved peacefully. But, if he cursed his father or his mother, his punishment would surely be death.

In addition to the death penalty, a curse also follows whoever curses his father or his mother. About this the Bible says, *"Whoever curses his father or his mother, His lamp will be put out in deep darkness."* (Prov. 20:20).

Not only was the death penalty restricted to whoever strikes or curses his parents, but was also applied to the stubborn and disobedient son.

About this the Lord says in Deuteronomy, *"If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his*

*father or the voice of his mother, and who, when they have chastened him, will not heed them, then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his city, to the gate of his city. And they shall say to the elders of his city, 'This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard.' Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death with stones; so you shall put away the evil from among you,"* (Deut. 21:18-21).

**The curse was also upon whoever took lightly his father or his mother, by mocking them or not receiving them with due respect and reverence.**

On Mount Ebal the Levites used to stand and cry loudly *"Cursed is the one who treats his father or his mother with contempt.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen! "* (Deut. 27:16). The Bible also says, *"The eye that mocks his father, And scorns obedience to his mother, The ravens of the valley will pick it out, And the young eagles will eat it."* (Prov. 30:17).

**The curse upon Canaan, the son of Ham, gives us a good idea about the punishment of not honouring the parents. Let us find out the reason for this fatal curse.**

It did not happen that Ham disobeyed his father or struck him or cursed him or spoke evil of him. All he did was that when he saw his father, Noah, drunk and naked, he did not cover him but *"he saw and told his brothers."* (Gen. 9:20-26). And because of this, the curse struck his seed the Canaanites for thousands of years to the extent that the Lord Jesus Himself (Christ the gentle and the tender, whose words are a mix of

kindness, tenderness and compassion) when He spoke to the Canaanite woman, emphasised this curse as He said, *"it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs."* (Matt. 15:26). Dogs?! A hard word no doubt, made even harder by the fact that it has come out of the mouth of the decent and kind Christ and addressed to a poor woman asking for the recovery of her daughter.

**But this harshness proves that the Lord approved the curse of Noah upon the seed of his son Ham and consequently, gives us an idea about the importance of honouring the parents and that it is not a minor sin for anyone to dishonour his father or his mother.**

In the meantime, we notice that as Ham's seed of was cursed, the blessings went to Sam and Japheth for when they heard of their father's nakedness, they *"... took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and went backward and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces were turned away, and they did not see their father's nakedness ."*(Gen. 9:23).

#### **4. The Prominent Place of the Father**

**The father is the head of the family. This includes the children as well as their mother, for *"the husband is the head of his wife."* (1Cor. 11:3). And, in the old tribal system, the father was the ruler of the family and the grandfather was both the ruler and the Judge of the tribe thereby combining the natural and civil leadership at the same time.**

**The father was the family's priest and intercessor with God too.** When the Law of Moses was implemented, Priesthood was restricted to the sons of Aaron but prior to that the father was the Priest of the family. We hear for example that the righteous Job used to offer burnt offerings on behalf of his children according to the number of them all, for he said, , *"It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts."* (Job 1:5). So he was their intermediary and their intercessor with God, as did Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all our forefathers the Patriarchs.

**A father's blessing was a great thing for which the son had to work hard, and ask with tears and seek by all means for whoever received his father's blessing also receive God's.**

So we hear that Isaac blessed Jacob. And despite the fact that Jacob sought this blessing cunningly, it was nevertheless confirmed and later approved by God, and so, God blessed Jacob (Gen. 28:1-14). We also find the mighty Esau crying bitterly with tears asking for his father's blessing (Gen. 27:38).

**And in as much as God approved the father's blessing, He also approved the curse.** We have already seen an example in Noah's curse of Canaan, thrice pouring on him the curse of slavery as he said, *"Cursed be Canaan; A servant of servants He shall be to his brethren. "And he said: "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem, and may Canaan be his servant. May God enlarge Japheth, And may he dwell in the tents of Shem; And may Canaan be his servant."* (Gen. 9:25-27). This slavery repeated thrice by Noah in cursing Canaan was later approved

by the Lord as is evident from His talk to the Canaanite woman as previously mentioned.

Likewise, the Lord approved all the blessings and rulings which Jacob the father of fathers gave to his children and all were fulfilled in due time (Gen. 49). An example of the evidence of the importance of the position of parents is:

## **5. God likened His love to the kindness of a father and mother**

When the Lord wanted to reveal the depth of His relationship with us and the depth of His love for us, He made an analogy between this relationship and the kindness and compassion of a father and a mother. It is true that the Lord is the Master of all creation. All was made by His hands and all is subdued under His authority and frequently we call Him Lord, and He is.

**But our kind Lord prefers to be called "Father" as this signifies love and compassion.**

So when our good Saviour taught us to pray He didn't ask that we address Him as our Master, Creator and ruler, but rather ordered us to say *"Our Father who art in heaven"*.

**The New Testament is full with verses which point out the fatherhood of God and express His lovingness and His compassion.**

As the Lord Jesus Christ spoke of our needs, He said *"Do not be anxious.... for your heavenly Father knows that you need all*

*these things."* (Matt. 6:31-32). *"... how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!"* (Matt. 7:11). And, in His speech about the kingdom He told us *"Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."* (Luke 12:32). And in His speech about making the good deeds in secret, He repeated more than once the phrase *"your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly."* (Matt. 6:6), and many are the verses that prove God's Fatherhood to us, they are not easy to count.

**This fatherhood is not a new teaching of the New Testament, but it is evident from the very beginning and from the early chapters of Genesis.**

The story of the Flood starts with this overture *"the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful;"* (Gen. 6:2), and so we find that God in His wonderful Fatherhood, did not disown His human children even while in the depths of their sins. The prophets of the Old Testament also felt the Fatherhood of God and addressed Him saying, *"You, O LORD, are our Father; Our Redeemer from Everlasting is Your name."* (Is. 63:16) *"But now, O LORD, You are our Father; We are the clay, and You our potter; And all we are the work of Your hand."* (Is. 64:8).

**In all of this, the Lord has revered fatherhood by calling Himself our Father He also likened the love to the compassion of a mother** as He blamed Jerusalem saying *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her*

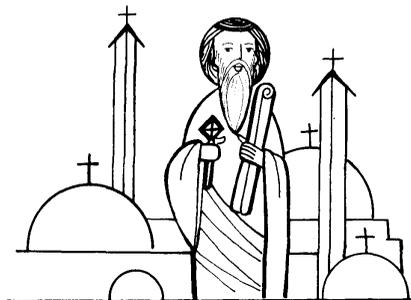
*wings, but you were not willing!"* (Matt. 23:37). Here He likens His love to that of the mother hen toward her chicks. Furthermore, He says that His compassion is greater than that of a mother who never forgets her nursing child (Is. 49:15).

**Finally, as God in all His kindness is our Father, the Church is our mother.** All of us are the children of the church.

The apostles were in pain for our birth (Gal. 4:19) and the Church delivered us in the baptismal font and fed us the milk of orthodox teachings and we lived in her bosom all this time enjoying her love and caring.

**For this reason we place these above every love and above every fatherhood and motherhood:**

## **THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD AND THE MOTHERHOOD OF THE CHURCH**



## CHAPTER II

### HOW TO HONOUR PARENTS

One may say I am convinced of the seriousness of this Commandment and of the necessity of honouring the parents, but how should I honour my parents?

**Honouring parents requires love, obedience, respect, gratitude and support.** Add to these, another element which we will begin with, that is success.

#### SUCCESS

There is no doubt that success in life is one indication of honouring parents. Your success does honour your father and your mother and fills their hearts with joy. True are the words of the Holy Bible, *"A wise son makes a glad father, But a foolish son is the grief of his mother."* (Prov. 10:1) and also, *"the father of the righteous will greatly rejoice, and he who begets a wise son will be glad in him."* (Prov. 23:24).

If you study hard and pass with distinction, if you are honest in your work and enjoy the confidence and love of your superiors, if you become successful in life and earn a good reputation and people speak well of you, then you are an honour to your father

and your mother and they will rejoice and boast about your success.

But, if you are a failure, then your father won't know where to hide his face and your mother will be ashamed. And, whenever someone brings up your conduct in their presence, they will keep their heads down. Rightfully the Bible says, "*a foolish son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her who bore him.*" (Prov. 17:25). "*He who begets a fool, does so to his sorrow, and the father of a fool has no joy.*" (Prov. 17:21). The Bible goes even farther by saying, "*A foolish son is destruction to his father.*" (Prov. 19:13).

### **History is full of mothers who were joyful to see their children successful.**

Hannah was pleased with her son Samuel, and Joseph, the successful man, was a joy to his father, and more so was Jesus to His mother the Virgin Mary as He "*kept increasing in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and men.*" (Luke 2:52). He had truly honoured her because of His exemplary life which deserved everyone's admiration.

### **In contradiction, there were the lost and failing children.**

The Bible says that Esau brought "*grief to Isaac and Rebekah.*" (Gen. 26:35) as so also Augustine as he went astray, was the reason behind the fountain of bitter tears shed by his mother St. Monica.

Therefore, my beloved, be successful so that you may make your parents glad and honour them by your achievements.

## GRATITUDE

It is a must that you realise the favours you received from your father and your mother. I do not want to advise reading a medical or a psychology text that you may recognise the status of your mother during pregnancy when she carried you in her womb for nine months and suffered a lot for your sake.

It is enough to know that she could not enter the Church during her confinement and at other times during her pregnancy. Add to this the hard work she did while nursing and as you were a little child for your meals, for your cries, for your cleanliness, by carrying you in her lap, on her bosom, and on her shoulders, and no doubt, a nursing child may, at times, deprive his mother of sleep.

To be sure, if your mother had failed to provide for your proper care, you would have suffered countless harms and angers. Therefore, no one should forget to be grateful to his mother.

**It is possible that one says, "True! My mother suffered for my sake sometime ago but she is now giving me hell." but even so, you must not forget to be grateful for she supported you as a child and now you should support her and tolerate her.**

Also, do not forget to be grateful to your father who struggled to bring you up and paid for your expenses and spent of his sweat and blood to satisfy your needs and felt that whoever touched you touched the pupil of his eye. Not only should your

gratitude be for the financial assistance, but also for the love, kindness and compassion which he had happily offered you.

**In order to realise the importance of these passions, we only have to see how many of those who were deprived of the kindness of their parents had fallen into serious psychological troubles and difficult problems.**

If your mother is now causing you problems for some reason or another, it is not appropriate that you forget her long and caring past. And be sure that if you counter her past kindness with a little of your present kindness, she will never forget your compassion and you will indeed reach the bottom of her heart.

How difficult it is for a mother to work long and hard to bring up a child, only to find out that as she grew older, he left her as if he has never known who she was!

## **SUPPORT**

It is a must that a person should take care of his parents and provide for them, especially in their old age, their sickness and their need.

**The scribes and Pharisees were blamed by the Lord Christ as they were not forthcoming in honouring their parents claiming they had to make offerings to the Temple,** so He answered and said to them, *"Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? "For God commanded, saying, 'Honour your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.' "But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, "Whatever*

*profit you might have received from me is a gift to God"; 'then he need not honour his father or mother.' Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition." (Matt. 15:3-6).*

And so, the Lord did reveal that honouring your father and your mother by supporting them with your money in the time of their need is more important than making offerings on the altar. And there is a strong verse dealing with this subject in St. Paul's first epistle to his disciple Timothy. It says, *"But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."* (1 Tim. 5:8).

Therefore, in as much as your parents took care of you in your childhood, you should also take good care of them when they grow old. For as the days go by, their responsibilities grow bigger. Sometime ago your father had only one or two children, but now he has a bunch of them with some going to College and girls getting ready to marry.

As expenditures grow, all members of the family should cooperate to meet the expenses. **By "cooperation" I do not mean that whenever another child finds a job, he/she should provide for extras around the house** which may not be necessary, or worse, may encourage sin, but rather, provide for the real needs of the parents and whole family thereby acknowledging their previous support and care as he grew and became able to earn an income.

On the cross, the Lord Jesus Christ did not forget His mother but left her to the care of His disciple the beloved John, telling him, *"Behold your mother!"* And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home." (John 19:27).

It is important then that a child takes care of his parents and provides for them. In the years of hunger, Joseph did not forget his father while far away but sent him saying:

***"Hurry and go up to my father, and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph: "God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not tarry. "You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near to me, you and your children, your children's children, your flocks and your herds, and all that you have. "There I will provide for you, lest you and your household, and all that you have, come to poverty; for there are still five years of famine." (Gen. 45:9-11)***

When I was a boy, I heard a story about a man who looked after his father who was pretty old. Because of old age, his father used to drop the plates as he ate. Frustrated, his son made him wooden plates to use. so he won't break them. Whenever the grandson visited his grandfather, he noticed that he was using wooden plates. So he asked his father about the reason. When he knew, he told his father, "please do not lose these plates dad for I would serve you food in them when you grow old like my grandfather". The child had apparently thought that was customary when people grew old. It is true though that in as much as one honours his parents, so also his children will honour him.

I read another story about an army that invaded a town and killed all its people. In this town, there were two young men who knew the commander of the invading army and whom they had done some favour earlier. Wanting to pay them back for their favour, the commander asked them to carry their most precious belongings and escape the town as soon as possible to guarantee their safety. They then entered their home to carry their most precious belongings and came out, one carrying his father and the other carrying his mother. Their parents were the most precious thing they had in life!

## **LOVE AND RESPECT**

The first love a person experiences is that of his mother, then, of his father. This comes naturally, without an effort to acquire it or to keep it. It is also a reciprocal love. Any deviation from this love is abnormal. This love may be manifested either in active or passive way.

## **ACTIVELY**

The child shows his love to his father and his mother by doing all he can to make them comfortable and satisfied thereby winning their blessing and satisfaction. This love and satisfaction continue throughout their lives and even after they leave to the other world when the child offers prayers and liturgy on their behalf and carry out their will to the best of his ability.

## PASSIVELY

The child should not anger or agitate his parents nor should he treat them with cruelty or hatred or ignore their opinion. He should not also exhaust his parents with frequent needs, especially those which are beyond their capacity. He should not also waste their belongings or taint the family's reputation through his indecent behaviour. The worst attitude, however, that a child may acquire is to wish evil or even death to either of his parents.

**The Bible ordered that whoever struck or insulted a father or a mother should he put to death. It also cursed whoever dishonoured his father or his mother.**

Dishonouring means disrespect. **An example is the child who puts himself at the same level with his parents** as if he is equally becoming argumentative and meeting anger with anger and loud voice with loud voice as if there are no differences, the sort of thing which happens between two equal parties lacking spiritual basis. This of course is inappropriate.

**It is fitting for the child not to put himself at the same level with his parents** for it is the father's right to rebuke and the child should not answer back but keep silent and listen. If the father or the mother raises their voice, the child should not raise his, for if he does, he commits a sin. Further, this is not consistent with the etiquette of talking with a father or a mother or showing respect towards them.

One sign of respecting your parents is to fulfil all their needs. By this, I do not mean to merely obey them in whatever they ask you for, which you should, but I actually mean more; for a wise child realises on his own that his parents need and helps them in all respects without being asked to do so.

**If, for example**, you see your father standing and tired, do not wait till he asks you to bring him a chair but rather go and do this on your own and respectfully ask him to sit and be comfortable. If you sit at the table and see that your father needs something, bring it to him and if you see his glass of water empty, fill it for him. Also, if you find your mother tired of the housework, give her a hand and do not wait until she asks you to help. At the table, do not sit and wait for her to serve the food, but rather help her do so, and after dining, help her clean up the table.

So help your parents and respect them. And do not think that you humiliate yourself by doing so. On the contrary, you will rise in their eyes and before all men, and most importantly, before God.

**An example from the Holy Bible:** is the wise Solomon as he sat on his throne. When his mother came to him, what did he do? The Bible says:

*"Bathsheba therefore went to King Solomon, to speak to him for Adonijah. And the king rose up to meet her and bowed down to her, and sat down on his throne and had a throne set for the king's mother; so she sat at his right hand."* (1 Kin. 2:19).

**When King Solomon stood up leaving the throne and bowed to his mother, he did not lose his prestige but rather added to it!** Is it then too much for a person to kiss his father's or mother's hand? or kiss the Priest's hand who is a spiritual father?

Another example is that of the righteous Joseph when he was the second man in Egypt after Pharaoh, ruling all Egypt, wearing Pharaoh's ring on his finger and holding all powers and authority and all people kneeling before him (Gen. 41:40-43) even becoming "*A father to Pharaoh, and Lord of all His house.*" (Gen. 45:8).

**But despite all the greatness surrounding Joseph, he did not disown his father, the shepherd,** but welcomed him into Egypt by sending him chariots to use. And, Joseph took his chariot and personally went to meet his father and introduced him to Pharos and was not embarrassed to say that his father and brothers were shepherds (Gen. 46:31). In this way, Joseph had given a lesson to anyone who shows embarrassment because his father is poor or uneducated or holds a minor job or suffers a particular failing.

A child must, therefore, respect his father. He should not take him lightly or ignore his opinion. **He should not think that he is "old fashioned" belonging to an older generation which should give way to the newer and (rising) generation!** Also, it is inappropriate for the child to ridicule his parents either by words or by looks or through any gesture or even through kidding; for the Bible says: "*Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father.*" (Lev. 19:3).

## OBEDIENCE AND SUBMISSION

Obedience is an important element in honouring parents. It is said of the Lord Jesus Christ that He obeyed the Father even to death, the death of the cross (Phil. 2:8). **When He was incarnate on earth it is said of Him that He submitted to Mary and Joseph** (Luke 2:51). He submitted to Mary for she was His mother and submitted to Joseph despite the fact that he was not His natural father but was in the same level of a natural father, for Joseph had cared for the Lord Jesus just as a natural father would, so much so that Mary said to our Lord, Jesus Christ: *"Your father and I have sought You anxiously."* (Luke 2:48).

The submission of the Lord to Mary and Joseph is a great and instructive lesson to us. **He, who the angels and archangels submit to had submitted to his parents!** He, who every knee of those in heaven and on earth and beneath earth do worship (Phil. 2:10). The Lord Himself has therefore showed us how far the Fifth Commandment must be followed.

**Of the magnificent examples of obedience in the Holy Bible is that of Isaac obeying Abraham** for he delivered himself to his father to be a burnt offering to the Lord. Another example of extraordinary obedience is that of **the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite** who delivered herself to her father to fulfil in her his word to the Lord (although it was a wrong vow) and so her father made her a burnt offering to the Lord (Judg. 11:30-40).

Another example of obedience which the Bible admirably mentioned, and which the Lord used to blame the children of Israel for their disobedience to Him, is that of the **children of Rechab** whose father commanded them saying, *"you shall not drink wine, you or your sons forever. And, you shall not build a house, and you shall not sow seed, and you shall not plant a vineyard or own one," but in tents you shall dwell all your days* (Jer. 35:6-10). The Lord was well pleased with their obedience and said to them, *"Because you have obeyed the command of Jonadab your father, and kept all his precepts and done according to all that he commanded you, therefore, Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not lack a man to stand before Me forever* (Jer. 35:18-19).

Yes, how beautiful it is to obey the parents. The Bible instructs us saying, *"My son, hear the instruction of your father, And do not forsake the law of your mother;"* (Prov. 1:8, 6:20, 23:22). Yes, how beautiful is obedience and how beautiful is submission, for they are two of the fruits of humility and good manners and, they are evidence of meekness and love.

**In obedience there is also self-denial and a challenge to one's personal will.** And undoubtedly, the more one obeys against his will, the greater is his obedience. Of the beautiful words on obedience which the Lord Jesus Christ said, *"For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me."* (John 6:38).

**ELEMENTS OF OBEDIENCE :**It is mandatory that a child obeys his parents being obedient from the heart based on love and a desire to please. True obedience - and not merely

pretending obedience - is based on true acceptance and without murmuring, it is also a quick obedience without wasting time and is obedience in their presence as well as in their absence and lastly, obedience in the Lord.

## **TRUE OBEDIENCE**

A child should obey his parents, not only for obedience sake, but also to avoid hurting their feelings, and also should obey aiming at pleasing their hearts even if the child doesn't like what he hears.

Once a child wanted to go to a party with his friends. When he asked his mother if he could go she refused and said, "do not go". The child was not pleased for he really wanted to go. When his mother saw he was sad and irritated, she gave him permission to go against her own wish. But the child thought it over and said to himself: "My mother doesn't feel good about my going. It was only to make me happy that she gave me permission to go but she is not at peace regarding this decision. And that means, if I go, she won't be happy, so it is better for me to stay". This obedient child finally prevented himself from getting his wish because of his love to his mother and his desire to please her heart. He was not convinced with her apparent, yet not true, approval.

**It is a lesson to all of us for a child may appear to obey his parents by getting their approval through insisting and pressuring them over and over if ever they refuse to give him what he wants. He may look irritated and sad until they give him the "OK", and then he quickly goes on with his plans before they have a chance to change their minds. Later,**

he boasts and says "never in my life have I disobeyed! I always get their approval". **True it is an approval, but it is one obtained under pressure. It is only from the mouth** and not from the heart, from within. It should have been a true obedience and not a superficial one.

## **PROMPT OBEDIENCE**

Obedience should also be prompt and without procrastination or delay or vacillation and without such words as "later", "OK, after a while", or "tomorrow, God willing", for this kind of response is improper. A good child obeys promptly. No sooner the word comes from his parents than he puts it immediately into action. Doing so, a child certainly enjoys the love of his parents, their blessings and their prayers.

An elderly monk was once asked: "why do you like your spiritual son "x" more than the rest and prefer him to the others?" He said: "Just wait ... wait". He then called on his disciples and asked for something but they all vacillated except that particular son. As soon as he heard the order, although he was busy writing, he stood up quickly, not even finishing the word he was writing. When the people saw that, they were amazed.

**This prompt obedience, we find most evident in the army.** An officer must obey promptly and without any delay. This is actually one of the virtues a person acquires in the service.

## **OBEDIENCE IN THEIR ABSENCE**

Obedience that pleases the parents should be the same in their absence as well as in their presence.

It was said that one of the youths was invited by his peers to go to a certain place with them. He apologised saying, "I can't, for my father has ordered me not to go there", they told him "don't worry, your father will never know". He replied, "yeah, I may go without him knowing but if I do, I won't be able to face him when we return, for I will be ashamed of myself because I disobeyed him".

## **OBEDIENCE WITHOUT OBJECTION**

True obedience should be from the heart and without murmuring. There are children who carry out orders but with murmuring in their heart or with murmuring of the tongue. They walk while talking to themselves and **utter phrases of objection damning what they are about to do.** They just obey out of habit but without actual desire or love, and may indeed carry out the orders but without winning the heart or gratitude of whoever ordered them. They may also obey out of fear and not out of love and honouring.

**There are also those who do not obey before a lot of argument and bitter questioning.** They subject every order to meticulous examination and analysis thus causing a lot of tension to those who order them, so much so, that a father may abandon his orders as he gets tired of arguing or may prefer not to request anything from an argumentative child.

**How sweet is the story of the tree of obedience** in which the elderly hermit ordered his disciple John to plant a dry stick and to water it daily, and the disciple obeyed, faithfully watering the rod for three years without questioning or argument in spite of the strange order. But, because of his faith and obedience, the rod blossomed (as did Aaron's stick) and grew into a tree which was named "The Tree of Obedience".

## **OBEDIENCE IN THE LORD**

Here is what the apostle said: *"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right."* (Eph. 6:1). The phrase "in the Lord" means within the Commandments of God. For if you obey a father or an instructor in what clearly does not conform to God's Commandments, then both of you fall into a pit. This, we say because sometimes we encounter devious fathers.

**So be obedient my child, submit to everything with all humility till death, deny yourself and your will and dignity but do not deny your conscience.**

In obedience, walk with wisdom and discrimination and remember the saying of St. Anthony the Great: "If you are ordered to do something which conforms to God's will, do it. But, if you are ordered to do what is different from the Commandments, then tell yourself that God's obedience supersedes obedience to men, and remember the Lord's saying: *"My sheep hear My voice ... and they follow Me."* (John 10:27).

One of the magnificent examples of obedience is what the children of Rechab did, according to Chapter 35 of the Book of Jeremiah. The Lord used them as an example in obedience to the Israelites so He sent them Jeremiah the prophet to tell them "*drink of the wine*".

**The Lord knew they were not going to obey even that great prophet. He also knew that in their disobedience to the prophet they demonstrated a great obedience to Him-- in its true sense with wisdom and discrimination.** The prophet took them to the Lord's house as the Lord had requested and put before them cups filled with wine and told them, "*drink of the wine*", but they said, "*we won't drink*".

**They said 'no' to the prophet with a clear conscience and without fear, and God was so pleased with their disobedience to the prophet that he rewarded them.**

This was a test by the Lord to set up a model for all of us. And the Lord considered their stand a very fine example of obedience for which He praised them and rewarded them and contrasted them with His disobedient people.

They knew that if they obeyed the great prophet Jeremiah in this matter, their obedience was going to represent a shattering of the sound spiritual principle they had followed for a long time-- that of the Fifth Commandment which the Lord had previously given. And God's Commandments never oppose each other.

Here, as we look with great admiration to the stand of the Rechab, we should meditate with greater admiration on what

St. Paul the apostle said regarding obedience: "... *But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.*" (Gal. 1:8).

Notice that the apostle did not say " ... to that which are preached to you, do not obey" but he rather said "*let him be accursed*". In explaining this verse, the Great Saint Basil elaborated to show the importance of the great principle forwarded to us by St. Paul concerning obedience. He said in his commentary revealing the seriousness of this principle in this verse, St. Paul the apostle, dared to excommunicate angels.

**Since the subject of obedience and submission is all sensitive and important in relation to most of the types of fatherhood, we have assigned the next chapter of this book to deal with it.**



## CHAPTER III

### OBEDIENCE AND SUBMISSION

A question which frequently perplexes people is: **"To what extent should a person obey and submit? Is it an absolute obedience? And what would an individual do if obedience means going against his conscience? Should he obey out of humility or should he listen to his conscience even if he is accused of being arrogant?"**.

The answer is that obedience as well as submission should be understood in a wise manner. Foremost, obedience should be to God before anything or anyone else. Next, we should obey people within the scope of our obedience to God.

**If, however, a conflict arises between obedience to God and obedience to people, then there is no doubt that one's conscience should listen to St. Peter the Apostle as he says: "*We ought to obey God rather than men.*" (Acts 5:29).** Thus, within the limits of God's Commandments, you must obey your parents. But, if you are ordered by either of your parents to break one of God's Commandments, then with a clear conscience, you may not listen to them, for God requests that you obey them as long as there is no conflict between their orders and His.

For example if your father asks: "If someone calls, tell him I am not here", you may then excuse yourself politely and in a pleasant manner. In this condition, It is improper to obey your father. Or if your father were a business man and bought some goods for twenty pounds and intended to sell them for forty pounds but told you to say he had paid thirty seven, here again, it is improper to obey but you should remember the verse that says "*obey your parents in the Lord*".

**In these circumstances, it is not proper for the parents to object and say: "Now how about the Fifth Commandment, which was written at the top of the second tablet and whose breaking brings penalties such as this and that?" Therefore, if parents want their children to obey them, it is imperative that they make requests compatible with and within God's Commandments.**

Of the prominent problems which meet religious children are some orders given by their non-religious parents. As an example: A father tells his children: "Let me treat you tonight by taking you to the movies" while that particular film may be obscene! Now this father may have a religious child who wants to excuse himself of going. The father, however, insists but the child is firm in his spiritual principles and refuses to go.

**Here, instead of granting the child his wish and encouraging him to follow his religious principles, the poor father thinks that his powers are shaken and his treat changes into an order which must be carried out.** He insists on enforcing his powers and on the literal application of the Fifth Commandment. He may then resort to accusations and

punishment. Whom should the child obey - God or his father in flesh?

**Should he obey his Father who is in heaven or his deviant father on earth?!**

So, because the child refused to see an obscene picture, all this furore has happened from a father so occupied with his authority and his orders without any regard to the spirituality of his children! And, from this point on, this father may accuse his child of mutiny and disrespect and mistreats him, giving him daily another cross to carry.

**This same furore may happen when a mother insists that her religious daughter should wear clothes which expose her body and beautify herself in a manner objectionable to the girl.**

The daughter insists on being conservative. But, instead of an encouragement she meets furore from her mother: "You are going to embarrass us!! People will say you are not sophisticated or classy. They may wonder if your mother really cares for your appearance. You've got to obey and wear this type of clothes, like it or not or else No Church .." This sounds more or less like the father's furore in the previous example.

**To you, Fathers and Mothers,** If you care to keep your self-respect, make your orders to your religious children within God's Commandments and agreeable with their clear conscience. Make orders that you know they won't object to, as

the saying goes: "If you expect obedience, ask for what is possible to carry out". **God asks that parents be obeyed. It is true. But, He also says, "Obey your parents in the Lord"**. Christianity doesn't depend on a single verse, but is rather a spirit. And, it is dangerous to take only a part of the teaching and leave its complementary part, for one half of a fact does not make a whole fact.

## **DO NOT PROVOKE YOUR CHILDREN**

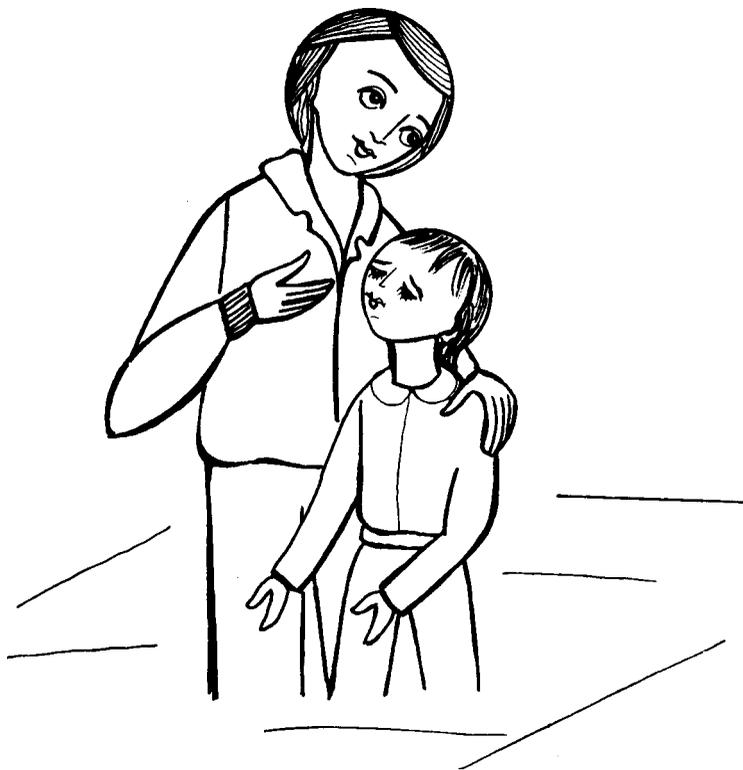
Let us meditate on what St. Paul the apostle said in his Epistle to the Ephesians. He said,:

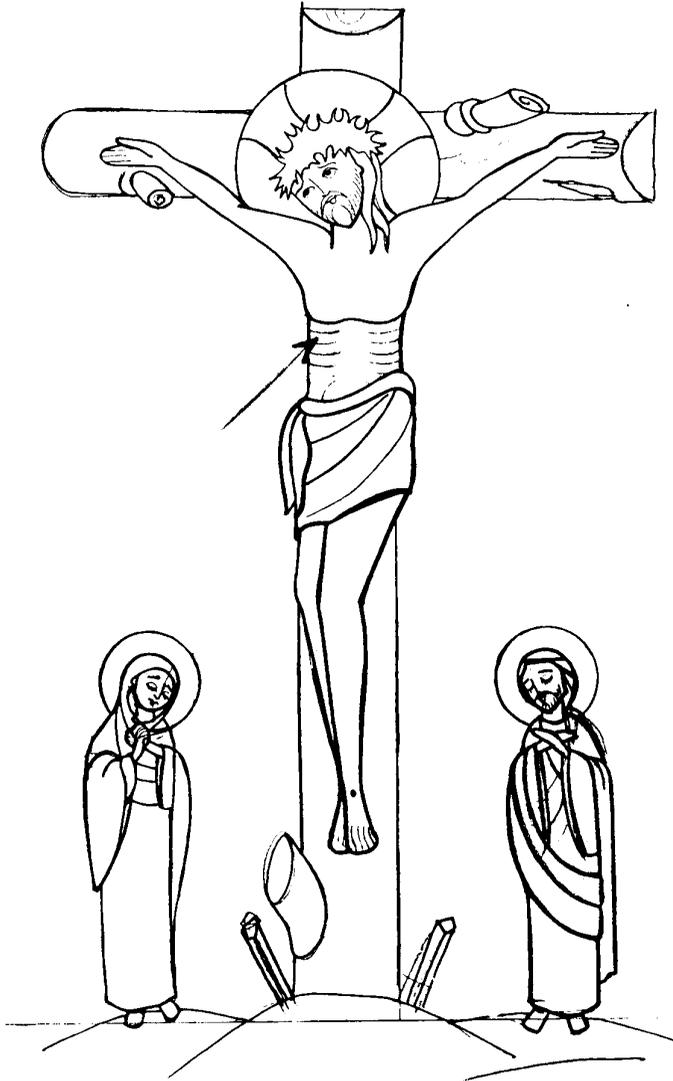
***"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honour your father and mother. " (this is only half the teaching! and what is the other half?) "And, fathers do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." (Eph. 6:1,4).***

Here we see that half the teaching is directed to the children and the other half is directed to their parents.

**The phrase "do not provoke your children " was repeated by St. Paul in his episode to the Colossians with a warning to the parents (Col. 3:20-21). It is as if God addresses every parent saying: "This child of yours I have put in your hands and have given him plenty of Commandments to obey you, **but you must not take advantage of this obedience and press on him or hurt his feelings and burden his conscience or ask of him****

**what is beyond his reach so that he may not fall; because if he does, I will hold you responsible for his blood!**





## CHAPTER IV

### PARENTS' RESPONSIBILITIES TOWARD THEIR CHILDREN

There is a duty on parents in return to their being honoured; for the principle is: **"for every acclaimed right, there is an assumed duty or responsibility"**.

Therefore, it is not appropriate that parents demand that their rights always be met without fulfilling their duties. This, we say to the parents. To the children we say: "It is your duty to honour your parents even though they do not carry out their duties and obligations towards you". **Some of the most important duties of the parents are** to bring up their children in the fear of God, to treat them well, to meet their needs, to care for them, provide for their education, set up a good example for them and to discipline them as necessary, firmly but with love and compassion.

**Bringing up the children in the fear of God:** At the time of baptism, fathers and mothers alike (acting actually as Godfathers and Godmothers), promise, before the Church to bring up their children in the life of faith and virtue. So they are responsible before God to bring up their children in a good spiritual way.

Often however, we see parents confine their obligation only to bodily and material needs without paying attention to spiritual matters. We see that they provide for food, clothes and medicine and prepare the child to achieve a prominent position through good education and prepare the daughter for marriage and to settle in a good home. But as to their spiritual future and ensuring their eternal life, they do not take these matters seriously, as if they are of no importance.

**If, therefore, you see that one of your children is corrupt or ill mannered or has caused you much trouble, remember then that you are reaping what your hands had previously sowed.** This child of yours was once like a soft dough in your hands which you could have shaped any way you wanted. Why then did you not give enough care that he might grow up a good child who could have pleased your heart and God's?

**We do not deny that sometimes we come across abnormal children,** as an example, Adam had both the righteous Abel and Cain the murderer. And Noah had among his children the blessed Sam and Japheth and also Ham who did not cover the nakedness of his father and brought the curse to Canaan. Likewise, Jacob had the righteous Joseph and also had his brothers who sold Joseph and lied to their father. Isaac himself had Jacob the righteous and also Esau who dared to sell his birth right for a pottage of lentil.

**This, however, does not mean that you leave your child to become corrupt and say: "I am just like our father Isaac whose son Esau was daring killer."** This cannot be an excuse, for your circumstances and those of your child are

perhaps sharply different from those of Isaac and Esau. But if you had tried to the best of your ability to help your child build his spiritual life and work for his eternal future and despite your efforts he slipped into corruption under circumstances out of your control, then and only then, you may have an excuse.

### **Marriage is a responsibility before God:**

So long as parents have a responsibility before God to bring up their children properly and to set through out their lives a good example, marriage, without a doubt, becomes a responsibility.

### **Marriage is not just a relationship between a man and woman but is rather a responsibility which requires fitness and credentials for fatherhood and motherhood.**

A question that needs to be answered is, "Is the man, who proposes to marry, fit to be a father properly bringing up children and setting a good example? And is the woman fit to be a mother, properly bringing up children and setting a good example? And are they both fit to be ideal spouses, building a holy home without quarrels or disputes or wrong doing which may stumble the children?"

**There is no doubt that motherhood and fatherhood require certain credentials such as spiritual and mental maturity and proper understanding of parental duties and of the psychology of children and the ability to bring them up in a sound manner.**

It is amazing to see a young man who proposes to a young woman confine his thoughts to one point only and that is whether she could be the good companion able to please him throughout his life or not, with no regard to her abilities as a mother. The same applies to young women considering young men as future husbands.

**This results in people having children without any ability to properly bring them up. Then if a child makes a mistake, he will face beating, screams and curses and will be accused of mutiny and disobedience. But, what about parental duties and obligations? They are apparently non-existent,** with parents only insisting on the Fifth Commandment as a source of absolute powers and rights.

Parenthood is a responsibility and a duty, and not just powers, it is caring, love and compassion, a continuous effort and sacrifice to bring up healthy and good children.

Remember **the mother of Samuel the Prophet** who brought up her child in the fear of God and dedicated him to the altar and said the beautiful verse: *"For this child I prayed, and the LORD has granted me my petition which I asked of Him. Therefore I also have lent him to the LORD; as long as he lives he shall be lent to the LORD..."* (1 Sam. 1:27-28).

We also remember with admiration **the mother of St. Timothy** about whom St. Paul said to him, *"For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois, and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well."* (2 Tim. 1:5).

Again with lots of admiration we mention **the mother of St. Augustine, Saint Monica**, who kept weeping concerning her son for twenty years beseeching the Lord for his sake and gave St. Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan, charge of him. So much so that this righteous Bishop said to her the son of these tears shall not perish indeed. And sure enough he repented and became a saint through the prayers and tears of his mother.

We mention too with all respect and glory **the mothers of the righteous martyrs** who brought up their children in the love of God and encouraged them to die for the Lord's sake. Of those mothers, some witnessed the martyrdom of their children even on their laps. These saints and mothers enjoyed an overwhelming spirituality that prevailed over their maternal compassion.

Of the great examples in motherhood is **the mother of Moses the prophet**. How deep was her spiritual effect on her son despite the short years (of his childhood) which he spent with her! How long did Moses actually stay with his mother? She actually received him from Pharaoh's daughter as a baby, and he stayed with her until she weaned him and he grew up a bit and was able to walk and then she returned him to the daughter of Pharaoh to be her son.

**But this religious and amazing mother was able in just a few years to fill her son with all the religious principles and to plant in him all the roots of faith. So, the forty years which Moses spent in the Palace of Pharaoh - with all**

**pagan worship around - could not strip him of his solid faith which he had received from his mother in his childhood.** It was such a short period which he lived with his mother but again it was of a special depth which helped him take the first step toward his spiritual leadership which was to come.

And now, how about you mothers nowadays? How many years did your child spend under your care or rather how many tens of years? I see you some twenty years after their birth, weeping, feeling sorry for their ill manners and fierce nature!!

**Through all those years which they spent with you, what kind of spiritual instructions did he receive from you, especially when they were like a soft dough in your hands?!** Let us hope that you take a good example from the mother of Moses and the other holy mothers so that you learn about your real spiritual duties as a mother.

**And before you ask your child's obedience of the Fifth Commandment, we would like to ask you what kind of spiritual preparation have you done to your child to make of him a good person who cares to carry out this Commandment and other Commandments as well?**

What I say to the mothers I also say to the fathers. And let us put before us the story of Eli the priest who did not bring up his children in the fear of God. And let us consider the ill fate which he had to face because of his negligence (1 Sam. 3:10-14;4:18).

## SPIRITUAL WORK AT HOME

Fathers and mothers, what is the spiritual work you do at your holy homes for yourselves and for your children?

**Do your practice family prayers** in which all the household meet and pray so that your children may get used to prayers from early on, or at least do you regularly pray for your children?

**Do you celebrate Masses and make offerings for your children's sake?** Look at Job and what he did in the Old Testament. He regularly made burnt offerings for his children's sake according to their number for he said: *"It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts. Thus Job did regularly* (Job 1:5).

**Do you read the Bible and explain the stories to your children and make them learn the verses by heart?** Here is what the Lord told us regarding His Commandments: *"And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up."* (Deut. 6:6-7).

So who among you carries out this Commandment at home? One day, a friend of mine pointed out a young man and told me that he came from a good family. He said: "I remember him since he was a little boy. **His mother was a saintly woman always bringing him with his two brothers to Church and kneeling with her three children before the altar with great**

**reverence.** Now, many years later, the child has become a young man, but I have never forgotten the old scene of his blessed mother and her three children kneeling together with all respect before the altar..." Undoubtedly, bringing up children in a spiritual environment has a very favourable effect on them especially in a Christian home where love, peace, and good example reign.

## **BODILY AND NON SPIRITUAL COMPASSION!**

A common parental mistake is showing compassion towards bodily matters and not towards spiritual matters.

**For example When fasting period comes, the children hear their parents say: "Never mind fasting lest you feel weak"** but what about their spiritual health? The latter doesn't seem to matter a bit in the bringing up of children! What is important to the parents appears to be the desire to see their children get fatter and bigger as if their primary goal is to build bodies or as if they are parents of bodies only and not of whole persons having body and spirit.

**Would it not be nice when fast begins to hear the mother tell her children: "It is not appropriate kids to have this fast pass by without making some spiritual gains. We have to subject our bodies so that our spirits may live and grow.** For it is not by bread alone that man lives". Here, the children would look to their mother with great respect and say: "Our mother is indeed a saint". But if their mother ordered them not to fast and their father also concurred, then what message would children receive other than the fact that their parents are

far from leading a spiritual life and that their main concern is concentrated on the body, its shape and growth.

**It is a terrible sin that a child forms a bad opinion of his parents and does not think high of them in his heart. But, the main reason for this is nothing but the stumbling block he meets in the manner his parents live and think.**

Why can't fathers and mothers think spiritually? Would it not be nice if a father sees his child not growing spiritually, to tell him: "Son, I feel that you are not advancing spiritually as you should. Why don't you read this book on the saints which I had previously read and make good use of ", or, "Come son, let us pray together."

**It is indeed strange to see many religious youths find their parents obstacles in the way of their spiritual growth and a stumbling block in their way to know God.** They interrupt their prayers, their fasts and their desire to attend spiritual gatherings, and moreover they criticise them if they abstain from certain worldly pleasures which do not agree with their conscience.

**Apparently these parents think that in as much as these pleasures are harmless to them, they will not affect their children as well, thus forgetting the differences in age and way of life.**

I do not know then how will these parents give (on the last day) an account before God of the spiritual lives of their children?!

## PARENTS AND CONSECRATION

Whenever a child wishes to consecrate him or herself to serve the Lord, they will find the parents the first to stand in the way as if consecration is a passage to prison or capital punishment. For example, **all the mother wants to see is her daughter getting married and settled in a nice home. But if she wanted to consecrate herself to the Lord, it would be like a disaster.** The mother would then start pressing on her by reasoning or by tears or threats as by saying: "Your mother would die if you did that, my blood pressure is already up, please be kind to your mother. This way you will kill me etc." All this happens because of a blessed spiritual tendency which needs wisdom and not a fight to settle. Matters will usually get worse if a man proposes to the young lady, at which point she will have to suffer patiently by playing the good host to please her mother.

In this circumstance, **the only rejected fiance is Christ Himself** about whom the apostle Paul said *for I have betrothed you... that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ ."* (2 Cor. 11:2).

## LOVE AND GENTLE TREATMENT

Fathers and mothers should lead spiritual lives to gain the due respect of their children, earning their confidence and appreciation through spiritual behaviour and not through authoritative power.

**Do not believe that parenthood is a sheer authority. Not at all. Instead, it is love and compassion, it is patience and it is a big heart to which the child moves and takes refuge. It is giving up oneself.** And so if it lacks compassion, it becomes a lifeless title. And if a parent chooses to rule and subdue and satisfy themselves with orders of do and don't just for the sake of affirming authority and the acknowledgment of position, then they become rulers and masters and not parents.

**The kindness and compassion of fatherhood is best illustrated by the Lord as He asks us to call Him "our Father".** In this the apostle John said: *"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!"* (1 John 3:1).

The same meaning was mentioned by David the Prophet in Psalm 103:13 as he said: *"As a father pities his children, So the LORD pities those who fear Him .*

**The signs of your love to your children include abstaining from pressing on them, asking of them what is within their capacity and reasoning with them to carry out orders that seem odd to them.** And rest reassured that by doing this, you do not lose any respect, but rather you make their obedience stem from within, from the heart, not from without by force. Look why children obey their spiritual mentors more often than their parents:

1. They trust the spirituality of their mentors and they feel that their words represent the voice of the Lord. This is the type of confidence I urge you to gain.

2. These spiritual mentors talk to them as friends with love and not with force. They do not address them in such a manner as: "This is what I demand, and that's that!"

3. They reason with them. They do not just give orders but explain ideas so they may understand the point and carry it out and a convincing word is always strong and to be obeyed regardless of its source.

4. They respect your children and the way they think. Here it is wise to remember the Egyptian saying: "Be a brother to your grown up child" that is to say, treat him as brother.

**A sign of your love to your children is to give them freedom with some direction; for God Himself gives us the freedom of choice.** Finally, do not force your children in matters concerning their marriage but rather advise them. It is imperative that they approve of the other person with whom they will spend the rest of their lives.

Do not force them in matters concerning their career but simply offer the advice; for each one of them has his/her tendencies which conform to his/her psychology, mentality and gifts. Give your children the freedom in their religious practices and be sure that religion is good for them and good for you, on earth and in heaven. And, do not be a stumbling block in the way of their spiritual life so as not to lose them.

## CHAPTER V

### THE LIMITS OF HONOURING PARENTS

To what extent should a person honour his parents? And if there are limits, what are they? To answer this question, we say: A person must honour and love his parents to the best of his ability. But his love to his parents should not conflict with other sacred matters. Therefore, his love to his parents:

#### 1. Should not be stronger than his love to God:

In this matter the Lord spoke quite frankly and said, "*He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me.*" (Matt. 10:37). Therefore, you love your father and your mother but if this love conflicts with your love to God, then you listen to the Lord's saying, "*If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.*" (Luke 14:26). This, of course, would be the case if your parents tried to get you away from the Lord's path or if they are against God or God's work. So, for God's sake and His love, you must put aside all other love. You may leave your father, your mother and your relatives all together. About this the Lord says, "*Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time; houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life.*" (Mark 10:29-30).

**The love of God should be placed over and above any other love. And loving the parents should be contained in the love of God. It is inappropriate to put the love of a father above that of God or to break one of God's Commandments just to be nice to a father nor is it appropriate to be an accomplice in his wrong doing. About this we shall give examples from the Holy Bible and from the history of the Church:**

**The righteous Jonathan reprimands his father Saul:**

We know that Jonathan loved David and that Saul the King was jealous of David and wanted to kill him and get rid of him. And to this end he had tried more than once. But Jonathan did his best to save David.

**He simply saw that the truth was on one side and that his father was on the opposite side. He then stood by the truth and against his father. He refused to flatter his father but reprimanded him and fought hard to disrupt his evil plans.**

*Once " ... Saul spoke to Jonathan his son and to all his servants, that they should kill David; but Jonathan, disobeyed the order and did not join his father in his opinion or in his plot. On the contrary, Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father, and said to him, "Let not the king sin against his servant, David, because he has not sinned against you, and because his works have been very good toward you. Why then will you sin against innocent blood, to kill David without a cause?" 1 Sam. 19:1-7).*

**And, so did Jonathan reveal to his father his sin against David and indeed praised David before him, without fear, thus convincing him to back off his plans and thus David lived.**

And Jonathan made a covenant with David (knowing that his father hated him) and agreed with him on a secret plan to save him from his father and defended David before his father. Then Saul's anger was aroused against Jonathan, and he said to him, *"You son of a perverse, rebellious woman! Do I not know that you have chosen the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of your mother's nakedness?"* (1 Sam. 20:30).

**But Jonathan stood unshaken facing his father's anger and attacked his father's decisions another time till he made his father outraged and on the brink of killing him.**

About this the Bible says: *"And Jonathan answered Saul his father, and said to him, "Why should he be killed? What has he done?" Then Saul cast a spear at him to kill him, by which Jonathan knew that it was determined by his father to kill David. So Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger, and ate no food."* (1 Sam. 20:32-34).

And Jonathan went to tell David and saved his life *"and they kissed each other and wept together."* (1 Sam. 20:41), and Jonathan told David *"Go in peace"*.

**Thus, the righteous Jonathan pointed out to his father his mistakes and reprimanded him for his decisions defending David with great courage exposing himself to Saul's anger**

**and outrage. He then did his best to spoil his father's plans and saved David's life.**

Can we then say that according to the Fifth Commandment, Jonathan should have cooperated with his father in the killing of David, or at least should have kept silent without any opposition?! Absolutely not! For if he did - through misunderstanding of the Commandment - he would have sinned against God, against David, against himself and against Saul, his father.

### **King Solomon and His Mother:**

Another example from the Bible is what happened between King Solomon and his mother. His mother came to him and he received her with all respect. He arose to meet her, bowed before her and made her sit on his right. Then she said: *"I am making one small request of you, do not refuse me"*. And the King said to her: *"Ask my mother, for I will not refuse you"* But, she made a request that was against the law. She wanted Abishag the Shunamite be given to Adonijah his brother as a wife. But Abishag was considered as a wife to their father David.

**But despite the great respect which the King showed to his mother, he did not honour her request on Adonijah's behalf, instead he ordered him to be killed.** And so said Solomon *"...if Adonijah has not spoken this word against his own life. Now, therefore, as the Lord lives... surely Adonijah will be put to death today."* (1 Kin. 2:19-24).

## **SAINT DEMIANA AND HER FATHER:**

Marcos, the father of this great Saint, was the Governor of Borollos and Zaafaran in the days of Diocletian the atheist king. Under pressure from the king, the Governor offered incense to idols. When the Governor returned to his state and his daughter learned of his action, she angrily went to him and strongly criticised him and told him he could no longer be her father and that it could have been a lot better if she had heard of his death. Owing to this strong criticism, her father's conscience was awakened and he went right back to Diocletian and confessed of Christ as a King and so died as a martyr thereby joining the multitude of Saints.

**And so, Demiana's criticism to her father could not have possibly been breaking of the Fifth Commandment but rather an act of saving her father's eternal life.**

And as said before, honouring parents should not contradict with God's love. Another point is:

### **2. Preservation of marital rights:**

The bible says: *"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."* (Gen. 2:24), (Matt. 19:5) and (Eph. 5:31).

So it is not appropriate that a man neglects his wife to honour his parents. I always advise, for the sake of preserving the new home that all newly wed should live independently and away from friction with the in-laws.

**The mother who likes to have her son continue to be with her in her own home after he gets married, is definitely breaking the Commandment which says: "*A man shall leave his father and his mother and shall cleave to his wife*".**

It is not right for the mother - whose son decides to live independently - to call her son ungrateful and to accuse him of forgetting about her. A wise mother is one who encourages her children to be attached to their spouses.

**If a woman, after a fight with her husband, decides to return to her parent's house to, her wise mother should say: "Your place, my daughter, is not here but there, with your husband - return to him and make up,** for the Bible orders you to leave your father and your mother and attach yourself to your husband. The false compassion which mothers show at times to their daughters while receiving them and encouraging them to leave their husbands is but one of the major causes of deterioration of marital relations.

Likewise, if a man loves his mother more than his wife to the point of breaking his own home, he fails to carry out the Commandment that says: "*A man shall leave his father and his mother and shall cleave to his wife*".

**This does not mean that the wife takes advantage of this verse in a distorted manner and cause her husband to change his heart toward his parents.** A woman who tries to harden the husband's heart toward his parents is not likely to be more loved by him. This is because the love of parents is quite natural and is-so to speak-in one's own blood. The love of a spouse is an acquired one which comes with time and by living

together. Finally, a person who does not honour his parents is less likely to honour his spouse.

**As to the Bible's words: "Leave his father and his mother: they apply to leaving their home not abstaining from giving them love, respect and gratitude or from supporting them within one's ability.**





## CHAPTER VI

### OTHER FORMS OF FATHERHOOD

#### **Relatives of the Same Level as Parents:**

The Fifth Commandment does not concern parents only but also those who are at the same level as uncles and aunts and of course grandparents because they are the parents' parents. The same applies to mothers in law and fathers in law. Believe me, if every wife treated her mother in law as her own mother and if every mother in law dealt with her daughter in law as her own daughter, we resolve many conflicts

**In general, you should treat older relatives and those who are higher in rank as fathers and mothers.**

This applies to the older brother and the older sister who should be treated with respect.

Other types of fatherhood excluding the natural one include:

#### **Spiritual Fatherhood and Reverence for Saints and Priests**

Just like we have natural fathers and mothers, God has given us a spiritual mother: the Church, and spiritual fathers: the prophets, the apostles, the bishops, the priests and all the saints.

## **Examples of Spiritual fatherhood:**

Abraham the father of fathers was called father to all of us, *"that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised,"* (Rom. 4:11). Despite the fact that we are not his natural offspring, *"... so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all."* (Rom. 4:16).

Also when **the prophet Elisha** saw the prophet Elijah ascending to heaven, he cried out loud *"my father, my father, the chariots of Israel and its horsemen."* (2 Kin. 2:12).

**In the same manner, the King addressed Elisha the prophet (2 Kin. 13:14) and both Elisha and Elijah were celibate, but it was a spiritual fatherhood.**

About this spiritual fatherhood, St. Paul sent Philemon a message regarding Onesimus: *"I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains,"* (Phil. 1:10). Now Saint Paul was also celibate and his fatherhood to Onesimus was undoubtedly spiritual - the same as his fatherhood to Timothy about whom he said: *"To Timothy, a true son in the faith."* (1 Tim. 1:2) , and also *"to Timothy, my beloved son."* (2 Tim. 1:2).

Regarding spiritual fatherhood, the apostle Paul told the Galatians: *"My little children, for whom I labor in birth again."* (GaL 4:19). He also addressed the Corinthians: *"...but as my beloved children I warn you. For though you might have*

*ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord."* (1 Cor. 4:14-17).

**And the apostle John - a celibate too - spoke of his spiritual fatherhood and said "My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin."** (1 John 2:1). And also, *"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth."* (3 John 1:4).

**Likewise, the Didascalia mentions in the 6th chapter that the bishop is "your father after God". And the Church describes the saints in the liturgy as "our fathers the saints".** Also in the Litany of the Departed, we say: "Pray for our fathers and brothers who departed... our fathers the saints and archbishops, our fathers the bishops, our fathers the priests, our fathers the monks ... "

**And, because the Church always reveres fatherhood, she addresses its supreme leader the patriarch "Papa" and its bishops "Anba" which means father.** This is because, the love inherent in the title is the basis of ministry and pastoral work.

**Fatherhood has more profound effect than authority:** Even though we acknowledge that a bishop is a master, chief, king and shepherd as mentioned in the "Didascalia", yet we become overwhelmed by another deeper feeling of love and reverence as we address him as "our father the Bishop" "our father the Metropolitan" or "our father the Patriarch". This is very much

like addressing God as "our Father" but without reducing God's authority over us.

**You father bishop when you forget that you are chief and master and remember that you are a father gathering your children in your bosom as the chicken gathers her hens under its wings, then you will live in an environment of love which will firmly attach you to your children more than any form of authority.**

It is your right, bishop, to order and be obeyed but it is better that you forget your authority and win the people's obedience out of love and not out of fear, seeking your blessing and approval not fearing your punishment and authority.

**Through love, the bishop wins a different type of obedience, the one stemming out of confidence and satisfaction of the heart.** Listen to the beautiful words of the Bible:

*"If you will be a servant to this people today, and serve them, and speak good words to them... then they will be your servants forever" (1 Kin. 12:7).*

**The fatherhood of a pastor is not an official title but rather a state of love, caring and kindness readily felt by whoever deals with the pastor even from a distance;** for the pastor represents the big heart which attracts all those who seek a solution to their problems or at least compassion in their hardships.

A true pastor enters the school of love before entering the school of service. People therefore will be his children in a

true sense regardless of his title. Even if his gifts are limited, his love will always prevail.

**To be truly a master, a pastor should reign with love over the hearts of his children and should avoid taking a worldly appearance deviating to the love of power and supremacy. His objective is to win souls to the Lord and not to win their obedience and submission to his person!**

Of course, it is easy for the pastor to justify his actions and say: "I am not seeking a personal honour but rather the honour of priesthood"!! **But this is a mistaken understanding of the honour of priesthood. Christ Himself did not lose any honour when he bowed and washed His disciples' feet, but rather we honoured him more when we saw His humility. Pastor! If subjugating people to your priestly authority, and putting them down under you feet make you happy, you are then a master and not a father. If you are a true father, however, you won't be able to sleep if you subdue your child and put him down and let him retire with a troubled soul! Submission is an easy matter but more superior is love and respect.**

The loving pastor convinces his children of the wisdom of his orders in the same way the Lord used to explain things. And although the road to convincing is long, yet it is stable and productive. **But the road to authority is short, dangerous, and unstable. It may make matters work for a while but it does not satisfy the heart of the subdued nor does it save the soul of the master.**

The pastor may win the submission of people without winning their respect or reverence. He may obtain their respect to his title rather than to his person. Pastors however who will always be remembered are the ones who earn the respect of people and the love of the Lord no matter how small their titles may be.

**A reciprocal Love:** If a pastor's ministry lost its love, then it has lost its main support. For without the love which binds the spiritual father with his children, he cannot do anything for their salvation or for the benefit of their spirit.

**Through love, they open their hearts to him and he knows their spiritual needs** and so his service becomes a practical one in a close relationship.

**Through love, they accept his suggestions to solve their problems** and this makes his service even easier. Through love, it becomes also possible for the spiritual children to accept from their spiritual father rebuke, discipline and even punishment. For they know, that he does not do this out of cruelty but rather for their own good. They then remember the saying of the Holy Bible: *"Faithful are the wounds of a friend."* (Prov. 27:6). And on the contrary, if the father does not win their love, his children will not accept his discipline.

**Through love, it is also possible for spiritual children to talk openly with their father, even criticising him, knowing that he will not be upset with the truth** and that his big heart is able to deal with their ideas and words and with whatever

doubts the devil may give them about him. And as the disciple said, "... *love casts out fear.*" (1 John 4:18).

### **Examples from the life history of Saints:**

Of this love we see many examples in the lives of saints as evidenced by the continued gathering of the people around their pastors. This was the case with St. Athanasius in all his hardships and every time he was exiled. The love which St. John Chrysostom received and the love which was expressed to St. Ighantius of Antioch when the people of Rome decided to kidnap him to prevent him from being thrown to the lions.

**Another example of this amazing love is what St. Paul saw in his children** about whom he once said, "... *for I bear you witness, that if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me.*" (Gal. 4:15).

This love was quite manifest in the emotional farewell which occurred in Miletus as the Bible says, "... *Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him, 38 sorrowing most of all for the words which he spoke, that they would see his face no more.*" (Acts 20:37-38).

**How deep are the words of love written in the Epistle to the Romans as St. Paul says:** "*Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life* " ...*Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who is the first fruits of Achaia to Christ greet Ampliatus my beloved in the Lord ... and Stachys my beloved ... Greet the beloved Persis, who*

*labored much in the Lord. Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine." (Rom. 16: 3-16).*

**Many men and women are mentioned by name with words of love. Look how many times he described them as "my beloved" thanking them for their efforts for the sake of the Lord, and for his sake acknowledging how they were willing to put their necks on the line for his life.**

This is the kind of amazing love which tied them together. Similarly, St. Paul used to talk to his beloved children, the bishops, as in the case of Timothy *"my beloved son."* (2 Tim. 1:2).

**In the same style of love, John the apostle lived with his children.** He starts his second Epistle saying *"THE ELDER, To the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth."* (2 John).

He starts his third epistle saying: *"The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth. Beloved, I pray that in all respect you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers".*

**This love toward spiritual children was taught to the apostles by the Lord Himself,** the very compassionate and loving Christ who, because of his great love, made it possible for St. John to lean on His chest and be called *"The disciple whom Jesus loved"* and who, because of His great love, let the woman who sinned wet His feet with her tears and wipe them with her hair and about whom the Lord said that her many sins were forgiven for she loved much (Luke 7:47).

**This is our beloved God Jesus who loved His own who are in the world and loved them to the very end** (John 13:1). Owing to this love, He gave up Himself for their sake and because of it He appeared to them after the resurrection to strengthen and support their faith. This is the love which made the children gather around him and shout as he entered Jerusalem and the women follow him from Galilee (Matt. 27:55). and women who also mourned and lamented Him (Luke 23:27).

**The Lord Jesus was quite loved and so also were His disciples and their successors the bishops. This love which binds the spiritual fathers to the children is the corner stone of the pastor's work.**

If we then mention the word "father" we should mention side by side all aspects of love. For the word "father" without evident love becomes reduced only to a title without life and without meaning. For people expect from their spiritual fathers to show practical love and compassion.

**Therefore, a fatherhood which asks more than gives and blames more than consoles** and wounds more than heals needs to reconsider its position and strive to win the love which is not an official job but compassion, kindness, caring and giving up oneself.



## **Respect and Reverence for Saints**

Honour is also due to the saints who slept in the Lord. These include our fathers the martyrs, the heroes who defended the faith, the saints of inner deserts, the monks and our fathers the priests.

**We honour them by building churches carrying their names, by celebrating their feasts, by mentioning their names in our praises and prayers,** by propagating their sweet aromatic life among people and reading it to the worshippers and by keeping their Icons in our churches and their pictures in our homes.

We also honour them by naming our children, organisations, magazines and institutes after them. We honour them also by continual remembrance of them and asking their intercession on our behalf and by caring for their bodies and bones. We honour them further by following and spreading their teachings and following their footsteps in our lives.

## **The Fatherhood of "Age" and Respect for the Elderly**

There are those relatives who are in the same position as your father whom you have to respect and revere. There are those who are of the same age as your father whom also you have to respect.

**In general, you must respect all those who are older than you.** We see an example of this in the story of Job, the

righteous man. For Job had three friends: Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar. There was a fourth one named Elihu. The three kept discussing matters with Job over the course of twenty eight chapters. But Elihu kept silent, hearing without uttering a word for they were older than him. When they failed in their discussion, he had to interfere... and he spoke out and said: *"I am young in years, and you are very old; Therefore I was afraid, And dared not declare my opinion to you. I said, 'Age should speak, And multitude of years should teach wisdom.' "* (Job. 32:6-7).

We can take a lesson from this behaviour, and that is: the young should keep silent in the presence of the old. He sits to listen, understand and learn. This is the case with monks where it is not permissible for the beginners among them to talk in the presence of the elderly.

**It has been said: Do not volunteer with words in the presence of the elders.** If an older person was asked but didn't know, it becomes necessary out of good manners-that the young does not speak even if he knew the correct answer. It is also inappropriate for the young to raise his voice while conversing with the elders, but rather address them with all respect.

About this St. Paul said to his disciple Timothy the Bishop and he was young - drawing his attention to the respect of the elderly: *"Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers."* (1 Tim. 5:1-2).

If Timothy the Bishop was supposed to treat the elderly as fathers and mothers would it not be appropriate for a lay person to do the same?!

**St. Paul himself demonstrated the same degree of respect to the elderly** as he said in his Epistle to the Romans: "*Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine. me also.*" (Rom. 16:13) and so he called Rufus, mother his mother while in fact she was considered his daughter from the spiritual point of view.

Likewise from the "age" point of view, St. Peter considered St. Mark as his son, as he said, "*... and so does Mark my son.*" (1 Pet. 5:13).

**The Lord has also asked us to take the last seat in wedding feasts (Luke 14:10). This principle of "the last seat" should be observed with all those who are older than us**, for the Bible says "*You shall rise before the grey headed and honour the presence of an old man.*" (Lev. 19:32).

It is not proper to sit while an older person stands. When you sit, you should do so in a respectful posture. It is not also proper to sit and give your back to those who are older than you.

If you happened to be walking along with an older person and he/she happened to be carrying a load, you should offer to help carry the load and so forth. You should also speak with older people with respect and also put them ahead of you in all respects.

**Having said this about respect, you should also obey your spiritual father and whoever possesses knowledge and wisdom regardless of age.** For there may be elders at fault (see examples in 1 Kin 2:6,9 - Job 32:9 - Joh. 8:9 - Ps. 119:100 - Ecc. 4:13), and there may be the young and wise as Joseph and Daniel and St. Athanasius.



## **Fatherhood of "Rank" and Respect for Teachers**

The fatherhood of "Rank" and of the position of responsibility was made clear in the Holy Bible on different occasions. As a caretaker, Job said, "*I was a father to the poor,*" (Job. 29:16)

When the righteous Joseph took on the supervision over the house of Pharaoh, he said, God: "*... has made me a father to Pharaoh.*" (Gen. 45:8).

As Naaman the Syrian got uptight about washing in the river Jordan for healing,. His servants came near and spoke to him, and said, "*My father, if the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it?*" (2 Kin. 5:13). So they called him "father" because of his rank.

In the same manner David told Saul the King "*Moreover, my father, see! Yes, see the corner of your robe in my hand!*" (1 Sam. 24:11). Therefore, expressing both a fatherhood of rank and a fatherhood of age.

**In this respect, the Fifth Commandment applies to chiefs and teachers and whoever is a stewards or in the level of responsibility.**

A student who does not honour or obey his teacher or is a trouble maker or breaks the school regulations, does indeed

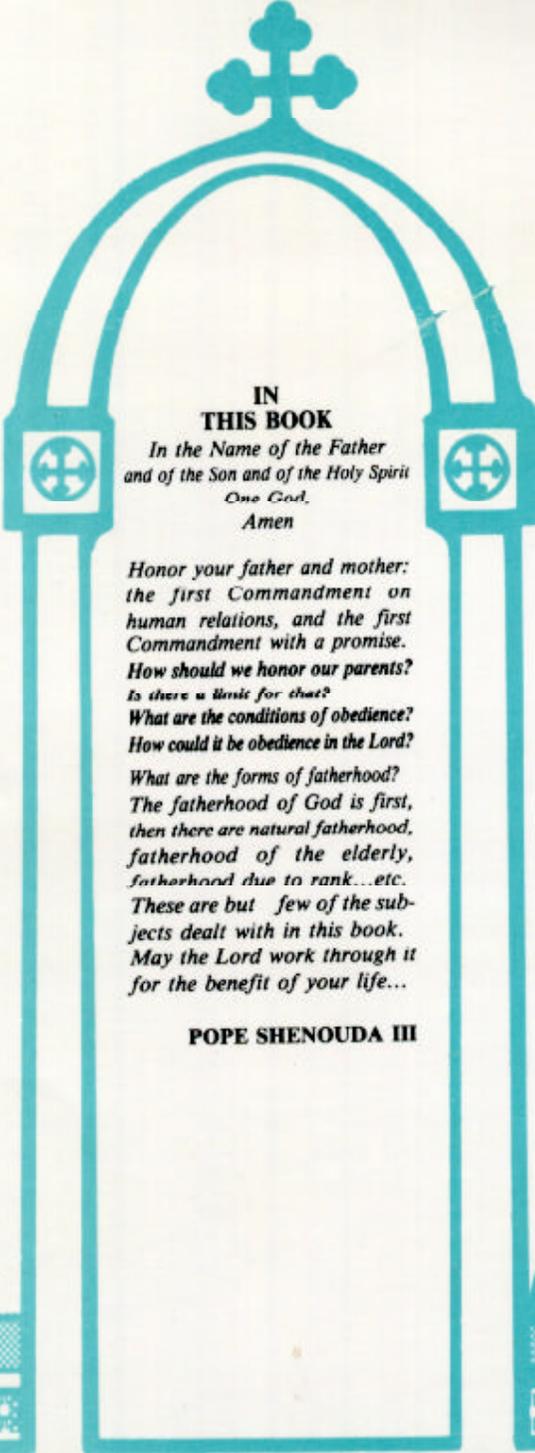
break the Fifth Commandment. The same applies to a citizen who breaks the law of the country.

Now we can clearly see the large sphere covered by the Fifth Commandment *"Honour your father and your mother"* .

As far as the length of the days on earth, one may take this in the literal sense meaning a long life or it could be understood as eternity *"in the land of the living."* (Ps. 27:13).

**Glory be to God, now  
and ever and unto the age  
of ages,  
Amen**





**IN  
THIS BOOK**

*In the Name of the Father  
and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit  
One God,  
Amen*

*Honor your father and mother:  
the first Commandment on  
human relations, and the first  
Commandment with a promise.  
How should we honor our parents?  
Is there a limit for that?  
What are the conditions of obedience?  
How could it be obedience in the Lord?  
What are the forms of fatherhood?  
The fatherhood of God is first,  
then there are natural fatherhood,  
fatherhood of the elderly,  
fatherhood due to rank...etc.  
These are but few of the sub-  
jects dealt with in this book.  
May the Lord work through it  
for the benefit of your life...*

**POPE SHENOUDA III**

