The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS ***GENERAL AUDIENCE***

St Peter's Square
Wednesday, 19 September 2018

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

On the journey within the Ten Words, today we come to the Commandment on the father and mother. It speaks of the honour owed to parents. What is this '*honour*'? The Hebrew term indicates glory, value, literally 'importance', consistent with reality. It is not a question of external forms but of truth. To honour God, in the Scriptures, means recognizing his reality, acknowledging his presence; this is also expressed with rites, but above all it means giving God his proper place in life. Thus, honouring our father and mother also means recognizing their importance with practical actions, which express dedication, affection and care. But it is more than this.

The Fourth Word has a particular characteristic: it is the Commandment that contains a result. In fact, it says: "Honour your father and your mother, as the Lord your God commanded you; *that your days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with you, in the land which the Lord your God gives you*" (Dt 5:16). Honouring our parents leads to a long and happy life. The word 'well' in the Decalogue appears only linked to the relationship with parents.

This pluri-millenial wisdom declares what human sciences have been able to establish for just a little more than a century: that the influence of childhood marks our entire life. It can often be easy to understand if someone has grown up in a healthy and balanced environment. But likewise to understand if a person has experienced neglect or violence. Our childhood is a bit like indelible ink; it is evident in tastes, in ways of being, even if some try to hide the wounds of their own origins.

But the fourth Commandment tells us even more. It does not speak of parents' goodness; it does not ask that fathers and mothers be perfect. It speaks about an act of the child, apart from the

merits of the parents, and says something extraordinary and liberating: even if not all parents are good and not every childhood serene, all children can be happy, because achieving a full and happy life depends on the proper recognition of those who have brought us into the world.

Let us think about how this Word can be constructive for many young people who come from stories of pain and for all those who have suffered in their own youth. Many saints — and countless Christians — after a painful childhood, have lived a luminous life, because, thanks to Jesus Christ, they became reconciled with life. Let us consider that young man — blessed now and next month a saint — Sulprizio, who at 19 years of age ended his life reconciled, despite much suffering, with many issues, because his heart was at peace and he never denied his parents. Let us think of Saint Camillus de Lellis, who from a disorderly childhood built a life of love and of service; of Saint Josephine Bakhita, who grew up in terrible slavery; or of Blessed Carlo Gnocchi, orphaned and poor; and of Saint John Paul II himself, marked by the loss of his mother at a tender age.

People, from whatever background they come, receive from this Commandment the direction that leads to Christ: indeed, manifest in him is the true Father, who invites us to be '*born anew*' *from above* (cf. Jn 3:3-8). The enigma of our lives is illuminated when we discover that God has always prepared for us a life as his children, where every act is a mission received from him.

Our wounds begin to be strengths when we discover by grace that the true enigma is no longer '*why?*' but '*for whom?*'; for whom did this happen to me? In view of what result did God mould me throughout my history? Here everything is overturned; everything becomes precious; everything becomes constructive. How can my even sad and painful experience become, in the light of love, a source of salvation for others — for whom? So we can begin to honour our parents with the freedom of adult children and with merciful acceptance of their limitations.[1]

Honour parents: they gave us life! If you are distant from your parents, make an effort and return, go back to them; perhaps they are elderly.... They gave you life. Then, there is a habit among us to say bad things, even to curse.... Please, never, never ever insult other people's parents. Never! One should never insult a mother, never insult a father. Never! Never! Take this interior decision yourselves: from now on I will never insult anyone's mother or father. They gave life! They must never be insulted.

This wonderful life is offered to us, not imposed: reborn in Christ is a grace to be freely accepted (cf. Jn 1:11-13), and it is the treasure of our Baptism, in which, by the work of the Holy Spirit, we have only one Father, the one in heaven (cf. Mt 23:9; 1 Cor 8:6; Eph 4:6). Thank you!

Special Greetings

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, especially those from England, Scotland, Denmark, Norway, Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania, Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Canada and the United States of America. I thank the choirs from Indonesia and Australia for their praise of God in song. Upon all of you, and your families, I invoke the Lord's blessings of joy and peace. God bless you!

This 22 September, in Neampt, Romania, Veronica Antal will be beatified. This faithful laywoman of the Secular Franciscan Order was killed '*in odium fidei*' in 1958. Let us thank God for this courageous woman who, in giving up her own life, bore witness to true love for God and for brothers and sisters.

I offer a special thought to *young people*, to *the elderly*, to *the sick* and to *newlyweds*. From whatever background you come, I exhort you, dear ones, to always be courageously oriented toward Christ. Indeed, only in him is the true Father, who invites us to be 'born anew' from above, made manifest. Thank you!

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[1] Cf. Saint Augustine, *Sermon on Matthew*, 72, a, 4: "Thus Christ teaches you to reject your parents, and at the same time to love them. Thus, parents are loved systematically and with the spirit of faith when they are not preferred over God: 'one who loves' — these are the words of the Lord — 'his father and mother more than me is not worthy of me'. With these words he almost seems to admonish you not to love them; but instead, on the contrary, he is admonishing you to love them. In fact he could have said: 'one who loves his father or mother is not worthy of me'. But he did not say this, so as not to speak against the law given by him, since it was He who, through his servant Moses, gave the law in which it is written: 'Honour your father and your mother'. He did not promulgate a contrary law but confirmed it; then, he taught you the order; he did not eliminate the duty of love owed to parents: one who loves his father and mother, but more than me. Therefore, one must love them, but not more than me: God is God, man is man. Love your parents, obey your parents, honour you parents; but if God calls you to a more important mission, in which affection for your parents could be an impediment, respect the order, do not suppress charity".

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