

## In praise of parents

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God of compassion,  
whose Son Jesus Christ, the child of Mary,  
shared the life of a home in Nazareth,  
strengthen us in our daily living  
that in joy and in sorrow  
we may know the power of your presence  
to bind together and to heal.

My text may be found in Exodus chapter 20 and verse 12:

‘Honour your father and your mother so that your days may be long  
in the land that the Lord your God is giving you’.

Today, in the UK, is Mothers’ Day. A mother is a fact of life that is common to us all. And today I’d like to focus my sermon in praise of parents.

The Ten Commandments are an ethical gold standard. The first four regulate our behaviour towards God; the second six are rules to inform our behaviour towards each other. And these six begin with my text today; with our parents:

‘Honour your father and your mother so that your days may be long  
in the land that the Lord your God is giving you’.

The key word here is honour. In Hebrew, it is ‘kaved’. Honour, ‘kaved’ literally means to give weight to something, which basically means to regard that

something as significant, of real significance. To honour is, as they say 'on the street', to respect. Respect is what we all long for. The current silliness with regards to bullying in the work place would evaporate if people felt they were accorded the respect which should be due to any person. Respect means that our dignity as a person is recognised. Respect means that our value as individuals is acknowledged. Above all, when we honour someone, as Dr Janet Scott was honoured by the Queen in her most recent New Years Honours List, we are according them the worth their achievement deserves.

By honouring our parents, we are looking outwards, away from ourselves, and are recognising what we have received from our mother and our father: our life; our nurture; a home, education, our family. Of course, for some the ideal is sadly lacking; for example, those poor boys who murdered little Jamie Bolger back in 1993, one of whom, Jon Venables, has just been committed to prison for an unspecified breaking of the terms of his parole. But for most of us, our mothers and fathers have given us something of inestimable worth and it is right and proper that we should honour them for what we have received.

To honour our parents, to treat them with the respect they deserve, is part of the right order of society. Our parents do what they do because it is right; we in turn should respect them because that it is right too. The fifth commandment is not a simple statement, 'Honour your father and your mother' it has a clause attached to it; a reason for our right behaviour. We should honour our father and mother 'so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you'. To respect parents implies that society will flourish. We will live long in the land

because a society that respects parents is a society that coheres, that sticks together. Respect is the social glue that enables us to live in community.

I believe that part of our social malaise in the latter party of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and now, as we move towards the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, is this fundamental lack of respect between children and parents. Nor is it a coincidence that one of the words we use for God is Father. We long for respect but are we prepared to give it?

In my research for the book that I'm writing on the history of Dame Alice Owen's, I came across in the Arrow (Michaelmas 1950), our School Magazine, a report of the Head Master's speech at Visitation in 1950, the year after I was born. Walter Garstang challenges his boys by stressing 'the duties which a Grammar School endeavours too inculcate - responsibility to parents, to the community and to God' and he ends by reminding them that 'only by an awareness of these obligations could a boy learn to make a full and right use of all his opportunities.' Respect begins in the home with our parents, broadens out to the community as a whole and then finally to God. To respect parents is to respect society and ultimately to respect God.

So today on Mothers' Day may we all practise the fifth commandment and honour our father and our mother. By doing so, we acknowledge the worth of their love and in turn are creating a more loving society which should embody the love we have for God expressed in the love we have for others.

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,  
Amen.

*Preached at the Eucharist*

*St Bartholomew's Dinard*

*14<sup>th</sup> March, 2010*

H: Sermon 21: Parents

