

Parents

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God of compassion,
whose Son Jesus Christ, the child of Mary,
shared the life of a home in Nazareth,
and on the cross drew the whole human family to himself;
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.

Our text this morning may be found in Exodus chapter 20 and verse 12:

'Honour your father and mother.'

Mothers' Day today in the UK - Mothering Sunday - and I'd like to ask you a question about the Ten Commandments. Eight of the ten are expressed in the negative - **'Thou shalt not'**. Apart for our text today, **'Honour your father and mother'**, which other one is expressed in the positive ? And the answer is, of course, the fourth **'Keep the Sabbath Day holy'**. Well I guess by a contemporary Christian understanding of what it means to keep the Sabbath holy, we are - by coming to church on a Sunday but, for a practising Jew, the list of don'ts from Friday night till Saturday sunset would be exhaustive. That said, let's not focus on the Sabbath but on mums and dads because today, on Mothers' Day, I'd like to ask the question, 'What does it means to honour our parents ?'

An honour might be a recognition of achievement. My dear friend, Neo, was awarded an MBE over twenty-five years ago in January 1990 for her service as an officer in the Territorial Army, the Royal Corps of Transport that latterly became the Royal Logistic Corps. Major Notley, as she was then, saw service in the First Gulf War, supervising the loading of a ship with supplies for Kuwait. But honour, in today's text, is a verb not a noun – a doing word – so what does to honour mean ?

Well the Hebrew word is kabed and the Greek is τιμαω (timaō) and they both mean the same thing – to make heavy, weighty, to honour. Really ? In an age when slim is beautiful and it is a medical sin to be overweight, to be clinically obese, that sounds odd – that to add weight to someone, to make them heavier is a good thing. But I think the image is financial rather than corporeal though in some societies being fat is a sign of good, healthy living. So if I have an ounce of gold that is good but a pound of gold is even better. That was obviously true in the days when coins had intrinsic monetary worth in themselves as they were made from precious metals. So I think to honour, in this old sense of its meaning, is to consider someone has real worth in themselves, i.e. we truly value them as people, as the people they are, as people to whom we owe so much: our lives, our home, our nurture, education and upbringing.

The Good News Bible translates the word 'honour' as 'respect' and I love the modern resonance of the word. Isn't respect what we'd all love to have ? Youngsters, ever mindful of their dignity and standing amongst their friends, value the word respect. Respect might be a good greeting and to disrespect, to

diss, the ultimate insult. For us, to respect our parents is to acknowledge the very real debt that we owe them and to want to treat them accordingly.

Of course, sadly, some of us may not have had a good experience as children and our memories of our parents may be far from the ideal. To have had an abusive father might well make you uncomfortable with the picture that God is our Father in heaven. To have had a mother who neglected you, who absented herself when you needed her love and care most rather might undermine the resonance in regarding the Church as our Mother. I am so sorry if that were the case for you.

But if all is well and all was well then all could be well in the future too. Today's children are tomorrow parents and if one respects the other, it is a model of Christian love and behaviour that is at the heart of a good society. To honour father and mother is the basis of the social glue that enables us to be a well ordered society.

So Happy Mothers' Day and may we cherish and be cherished by those we love and who love us, by those we truly value and respect.

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

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's, Dinard

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