

Honoring our Parents

Honor 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. ~ Deuteronomy 5:16

THE FIRST THREE COMMANDMENTS address our relationship with God himself; of the remaining seven addressing our relationship with our neighbor, the fourth commandment, directing us to please God by honoring our father and our mother, is at the head of the list. God's placement of the fourth commandment shows us his priority: after loving and honoring him, we next are to honor our parents, with whom he shared his power of creation of new life and to whom he gave his authority over these children.

The remaining six commandments are expressed as negative "thou shall nots," but the will of God concerning our parents is expressed as a positive commandment. And, unlike all the other commandments, to this one God attached a special blessing: "that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you" (Ex 20:12; see also Dt 5:16 above). This commandment is the very foundation of the family, the direct responsibility of children who owe their lives and their nurturing to their parents.

The foundation of the honor due to parents stems from the divine fatherhood "from whom every family in Heaven and on earth is named" (Eph 3:14). Respect for parents naturally derives from gratitude to those who have given life, a bond that is nourished by a natural affection: "With all your heart honor your father, and do not forget the birth pangs of your mother. Remember that through your parents you were born; and what can you give back to them that equals their gift to you?" (Sir 7:27-28).

The fourth commandment requires that children treat their parents with respect, reverence, obedi-

ence, gratitude, and love. The book of Proverbs reminds us of the care that parents lavish upon their children: "When you walk, they will lead you; when you lie down, they will watch over you; and when you awake, they will talk with you" (Prv 6:22). Gratitude is especially owed to parents who have given their children not only natural life, but also supernatural life through Baptism, and have nourished this life within the "domestic church" of the family home. Children should respond to parental love and care not only by being respectful and obedient, but also by solicitude and reciprocal care, for "whoever forsakes his father is like a blasphemer, and whoever angers his mother is cursed by the

Lord" (Sir 3:16). By this commandment, children also are expected to contribute to the harmony of the family. Filial respect helps promote this harmony, and it extends to sibling relationships. Respect and love for every member of the family brings true light and warmth to the home and family life.

As children grow to adolescence, it becomes harder to obey. Here Jesus' example

is instructive: at the age of twelve, on the threshold of adolescence, the Gospel of Luke tells us that he remained obedient to his parents (see Lk 2:51). Yet with responsibility increasing for their own decisions and actions, it is necessary for adolescents to weigh, in the light of their own consciences, the moral validity of a parental order. Rarely, it may be needful, even morally essential, for a son or daughter to refuse to obey a command that is in any way contrary to the law of God and the Church.

Adulthood changes the situation again: "Obedience toward parents ceases with the emancipation

"This commandment is the very foundation of the family."



of the children; not so respect, which is always owed to them" (CCC 2217). In our current society, we are busy about many things; in fact, so many things that the care of elderly parents can become an almost overwhelming task. Yet the fourth commandment is as appropriate for us in today's world as it was for the Israelites wandering in the desert. Today, adult children



Jesus and the little child, by James Tissot, 1856-1902

“The fourth commandment is also one of the foundations of the social teaching of the Church.”

are tempted to refuse to help aged parents. Yet we are admonished: *“O son, help your father in his old age, and do not grieve him as long as he lives; even if he is lacking in understanding, show forbearance; in all your strength do not despise him. For kindness to a father will not be forgotten, and against your sins it will be credited to you; in the day of your affliction it will be remembered in your favor; as frost in fair weather, your sins will melt away”* (Sir 3:12-15; see also Tb 4:5). We are obliged to care for them and provide for them in accordance with our ability and financial resources. Love and respect, or their absence, will determine the culpability of children who, for example, place their parents in a nursing home or other facility. The motive must not be selfishness, but to ensure care that the children cannot provide.

In broader terms, God's command to honor, respect, and obey extends not only to parents but also to members of the extended family. In the book of Ruth, we are given one of the most beautiful expressions of this familial love in all of Sacred Scripture. The widowed Ruth begged Naomi, her mother-in-law, who was returning to her home in Bethlehem after the death of her husband: *“Entreat me not to leave you or to return from following you; for where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God; where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Lord do so to me and more also if even death parts me from you”* (Ru 1:16-17). Ruth's deep devotion

to Naomi was praised by their neighbors, who told Naomi that Ruth was *“more to you than seven sons”* (Ru 4:15).

The fourth commandment is also one of the foundations of the social teaching of the Church. It governs our relationship with teachers, employers, civil and other leaders, to the lawful administration of statutes and ordinances, and to our com-

munity and country. The commandment applies to all who are subordinate to justly-exercised authority. Respect for the dignity of the human person must animate all facets of human relationships. Failure to observe this commandment in all its ramifications in social life results in great harm to families, communities, and individuals.

The essence of the fourth commandment is love. Fulfilling the obligations of love has enormous benefits, while failure to do so is tremendously destructive: *“Whoever honors his father atones for sins, and whoever glorifies his mother is like one who lays up treasure. Whoever honors his father will be gladdened by his own children, and when he prays he will be heard. Whoever glorifies his father will have long life, and whoever obeys the Lord will refresh his mother; he will serve his parents as his masters. Honor your father by word and deed, that a blessing from him may come upon you. For a father's blessing strengthens the houses of the children, but a mother's curse uproots their foundations. Do not glorify yourself by dishonoring your father, for your father's dishonor is no glory to you. For a man's glory comes from honoring his father, and it is a disgrace for children not to respect their mother”* (Sir 3:3-11). Jesus gave us his own example when, though he was God, he became a babe entrusted to human parents who loved and cared for him in countless ways. He shows us the way; we must follow.

(CCC 2197-2200, 2214-2220, 2234, 2239)

Stealing, Lying, Cheating

They bend their tongue like a bow; falsehood and not truth has grown strong in the land; for they proceed from evil to evil, and they do not know me, says the Lord. Let every one beware of his neighbor, and put no trust in any brother; for every brother is a supplanter, and every neighbor goes about as a slanderer. Every one deceives his neighbor, and no one speaks the truth; they have taught their tongue to speak lies; they commit iniquity and are too weary to repent. ~ Jeremiah 9:3-5

FRAUD, CORRUPTION, tax evasion, shoddy work, waste, vandalism, deceptive advertising, paying unjustly low wages, jacking up prices, inflated expenses, manipulating prices by financial speculation, forgery, cheating on tests, plagiarism, slander and libel, perjury, flattery, “white lies” — the list of sins against the seventh and eighth commandments, which forbid stealing and lying, seems almost a catalog of modern economic and social behavior. Our daily headlines tell us that honesty — living the truth about ourselves, our neighbors, and what we are due in justice — is sometimes hard to find and always hard to live.

“You Shall Not Steal”

Theft is the taking of something against an owner’s wishes. This may be from an individual owner, such as in a robbery or burglary, or it may be from a more “abstract,” collective owner, such as the owners of stock certificates. It may be tangible goods, such as money or electronic equipment, or it may be someone’s ideas or words. It may be a theft of a right, such as someone’s

right to be fairly paid for his or her labor, or the right to be treated as more than just a source of labor, which is the sin of enslaving another. It may be a theft of trust, such as failure to keep a promise or honor a contract. It may be ignoring others’ rights “in common,” such as the right to clean air, safe food, and pure water. These all have in common unjust actions between individual persons and between institutions.

Sins against the seventh commandment *require reparation* in the form of return of stolen goods or its equivalent in time or money (see Lk 19:1-8). This is

a matter of justice, for accepting forgiveness without making reparation is a violation of essential fairness in dealings between members of the human community. (Reparation, or repair of the wrong, is the underlying concept of the Paschal mystery, for only Jesus as both God and man could offer infinite reparation for the wrong done to God by our sin.)

Actions that some people believe violate the seventh commandment may actually not be morally wrong. An excel-

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lent example is gambling. Provided we do not deprive ourselves of what we or others dependent on us need, gambling is not sinful. However, for some people it is not possible to limit their gambling to harmless entertainment. As with the use of alcohol, the use of gambling can become gravely sinful, especially if it becomes an addiction that leads to debt, the destruction of the economic support of a family, or any form of theft to make up for the losses. Another kind of taking that is not forbidden by the seventh command is that needed to keep oneself alive if there is no other way to do so. Justice requires that every person have food, cover for the body, and shelter, and if a person is refused these when they are immediately needed and can obtain them in no legitimate way, he or she is entitled to take what is needed (see CCC 2408). This does not, of course, justify failure to seek honest labor or to refuse it when offered, or choosing a life of perpetual begging. *“Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his hands, so that he may be able to give to those in need”* (Eph 4:28).

“You Shall Not Bear False Witness Against Your Neighbor”

The eighth commandment forbids misrepresenting truth in our relations with others. We would find it impossible to live with another, says St. Thomas Aquinas, “if there were not mutual confidence that [we] were being truthful to one another”¹ (CCC 2469). The intention to deceive or lead someone into error is perhaps the most common sin against the eighth commandment. It is a direct offense against truth and the forthrightness of human interrelationships. A lie is the work of the devil, “the father of lies” (Jn 8:44). *The beginning of sin in our world was the lie of Satan, who used it to deceive our first parents* (see Gn 3:4). Cheating is a form of lying that many people believe harms no one but the cheater. However, as with all sin, there is damage done both to the sin-



Sorrowful Woman, by Ferréol Bonnemaïson, 1766-1826, after a painting by Raphael

ner and to the human community. A grade gained wrongly means that essential knowledge may not have been gained, and those dependent upon, say, an engineer or a physician may suffer direct harm. Passing off someone else’s ideas as one’s own is, in addition, theft of another’s thoughts and ideas.

Any action that causes harm to another’s reputation and honor is forbidden by the eighth commandment. This includes rash judgment (failure to interpret others words or actions as favorably as possible), detraction (revealing a truth unknown to others that could damage a reputation without sufficient cause), slander or calumny and libel (making harmful untrue statements about others — slander verbally, libel in print), and irony (belittling someone through malicious caricature of that person’s behavior). These are all sins against both justice and charity. Adulation helps to puff up another’s self-regard and thus encourages the sin of pride. Any encouragement or reinforcement of someone else in malicious acts and evil conduct is also a sin against the eighth commandment, since it is lying about what should be admired. Boasting and bragging, though possibly less grave, are offenses against truth and humility.

We all know people who pride themselves on their bluntness, in “letting the chips fall where they may.” This is a form of arrogance and uncharitable-

¹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II-II, 109, 5 ad 1.

ness that is not sanctioned by the eighth commandment, for truthfulness requires discretion as well as honesty. We do not need to reveal all our thoughts and opinions about others' behavior, appearance, children, etc., for respect for the person of others prevents all that would cause injury. Although we may not lie in withholding the truth, it is not always wise, kind, or respectful to "tell all" or "tell it like it is."

Concerning discretion, it must also be remembered that not everyone who asks for the truth has the right to have it. Respect for the common or individual good, and the safety and privacy of others, may require being silent about what should not be known. The private lives of others should be honored by all who treasure human relationships. The keeping of secrets, especially those that, if revealed, would cause pain or harm, or those that involve giving our word not to reveal them, is a matter of honor. In the case of professionals, such as a counselor, physician, or lawyer, the keeping of secrets is essential to the trust relationship with the patient or client. Furthermore, all individuals working for the mass media — newspapers, periodicals, television, radio, and communications on the Internet — must see to it that they exercise a fair balance between the need to serve the common good and the respect due to individual rights and privacy. And finally, we must avoid purchasing or patronizing the products of organizations that regularly and, in some extreme cases with malice, libel others or violate their privacy for prurient purposes (that is, to satisfy vulgar curiosity).

The gravity of a lie depends on the intention of the deceiver, the circumstances involved, the nature and magnitude of the lie, and the extent of harm that results. As does the seventh commandment, so the eighth commandment *requires reparation* to the extent possible. This is the case even if an injured person forgives the liar. Since a lie most often has public consequences, the reparation also should be public.



Crucifix, by Peter Kelley

“Lying words take wing, so to speak, and sometimes can no more be recaptured than can a swarm of stinging insects.”

Secret reparation and moral satisfaction are required when public reparation is not possible. The tremendous evil of lying about another consists, partly, in the difficulty of making full reparation. Lying words take wing, so to speak, and sometimes can no more be recaptured than can a swarm of stinging insects. Lying is vicious, for it can sow discord, destroy trust, and disrupt social relationships, sometimes beyond repair: *“Beware then of useless murmuring, and keep your tongue from slander; because no secret word is without result, and a lying mouth destroys the soul”* (Wis 1:11).

The sinfulness of a lie is particularly grave when the intention to deceive may lead to deadly consequences. This is most likely to occur when false witness is given in matters of criminal and civil law. When false witness is given under oath, the sin of perjury is committed. Any act or statement that helps to condemn

an innocent person, to exonerate a guilty person, or to alter the punishment of a convicted person in a way that fails to satisfy justice, is a severe compromise of the exercise of justice and the fairness of judicial decisions.

“You Shall Not Covet Your Neighbor's Goods”

The intention of the seventh and eighth commandments, like all the others, is to foster and strengthen love for God and for our neighbors with whom we share our world. The tenth commandment is intended to enhance the workings of society by forbidding the secret sins of the heart of greed, envy, and covetousness, which are the root of theft and dishonesty. We are admonished to *“put away all guile and all malice and insincerity and envy”* (1 Pt 2:1) and, instead, to *“put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore, putting away falsehood, let every one speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another”* (Eph 4:24-25).

(CCC 215, 2408-2415, 2464, 2469, 2475-2489, 2491-2492, 2494, 2496-2497, 2534, 2536, 2538)

Sacramental Living

Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. ~ Romans 12:2

THE DISCIPLE OF CHRIST is called to a completely new way of life. To live this new life, we must stay close to him. Christ said to his apostles, and to all that would follow him, "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:4-5).

There are three primary ways that we "abide" in Christ: 1) personal prayer, 2) reading Sacred Scripture and applying it to our lives, and 3) sacramental living.

"Sacramental living" simply means the living out of a normal Catholic spiritual life; a life within the Church in which the Christian fulfills his or her vocation. Those who live a sacramental life will abide in Christ. They will remain connected to the True Vine by being connected to the sacraments he gave us. Frequent reception of Christ in the Holy Eucharist and the sacrament of Reconciliation; for those married, living, day by day, the sacrament of Holy Matrimony; and reverence for the sacred priesthood are essential elements of sacramental living. Those who pray and form their minds and hearts with the Holy Scriptures, Catholic teaching, and the liturgical life of the Church acquire a sacramental outlook on life, a Catholic world-view.

Frequent Reception of Christ in the Holy Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation

Holy Mother Church, in her maternal solicitude for

the spiritual welfare of her children, obliges Catholics to attend Mass every Sunday (or Saturday evening to fulfill the Sunday obligation) and all holy days of obligation. For the same reason, she requires reception of the Holy Eucharist at least once a year, during the Easter season. However, a Catholic should make every effort to receive our Lord at Sunday Mass; only having not been absolved from mortal sin or failure to observe the requirements to fast should prevent the faithful Catholic from approaching the altar. In addition to the Sunday obligation, the Church encourages the faithful to go to Holy Mass frequently, even daily if possible. Jesus said, "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him" (Jn 6:56). Jesus is the Bread of Life who nourishes our hungry souls. He invites us to receive frequently.

One should go to meet Christ in the sacrament of Reconciliation approximately monthly. However, if mortal sin is involved, one should go as soon as possible, making an appointment with a priest if the sacrament is not immediately available on a scheduled basis. We must also recall that it is not only absolution from our sins that we receive in the sacrament of Reconciliation. We also receive God's grace to help

us change and avoid falling into the same sins in the future. A person struggling with a particular sin might wish to confess that sin more often than monthly. Making good use of the help of the grace of this sacrament helps in overcoming troubling areas of sin and vice.

Living the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony

For those who are married, sacra-

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DAVID CHARLES PHOTOGRAPHY

mental living means to consciously and to daily draw upon the graces of the sacrament of Matrimony. To live as a Christian family in today's culture requires husband and wife to stay close to Christ, so that they can be effective channels of grace to each other. They must commit themselves to personal prayer, to praying together, and to encouraging one another to holiness through prayer and gentle encouragement. Parents and children should pray together on a daily basis; it is especially desirable to initiate children into praying the Holy Rosary within family prayer time. A husband or wife who finds himself or herself in a situation where the spouse is neglecting to do his or her part must surrender it to God in prayer. During difficult periods, the help of a wise priest or Christian marriage counselor can be very beneficial.

Reverence for the Sacred Priesthood

By the power of God in the sacrament of Holy Orders, every priest brings the presence of Christ into our daily lives, despite their human frailties. Through the ministry of the priest, the Lord brings souls into the Church, fills us with the Holy Spirit, feeds us with his holy Body and Blood, absolves us from our sins, and offers physical and spiritual healing to the sick. We can only respond with awe and with profound gratitude for what the Lord accomplishes in and through the sacred priesthood.

A Sacramental Outlook on Life, or a Catholic Worldview

Having a sacramental outlook means seeing the whole of life through Catholic lenses. Developing a Catholic worldview does not occur overnight. We must develop the habit of personal prayer, form our minds and hearts by reading and meditating on Sacred Scriptures and on the lives and writings of the

saints, more deeply understand Catholic teaching, and immerse ourselves in the liturgical life of the Church.

There are some very practical ways that we can foster a sacramental outlook. First, we can follow the Church's liturgical seasons in our personal prayer and in our family lives. The Liturgy of the Hours, even a shortened form, helps to structure each day and season. There are also many practices and customs that keep the liturgical year: Advent wreaths, Christmas stables, Lenten fasts and sacrifices, Easter eggs (signs of new life). Numerous books offer specific suggestions, along with ways to celebrate, for example, specific saints' feast days.

Second, we can participate in liturgical and extra-liturgical devotions, especially adoration of the Blessed

Sacrament. The Real Presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist must be at the very center of our devotional life. Regular adoration of the Lord Jesus, either alone in a Eucharistic chapel or in prayer groups gathered before the Blessed Sacrament, leads to measurable spiritual growth. Other devotions in-

clude, for example, processions on the Feast of the Body and Blood of the Lord (Corpus Christi), May processions to place a floral crown on a statue of Our Lady, the Stations of the Cross during Lent, and communal recitations of the Holy Rosary.

Central to Christian maturity and this sacramental outlook is the renewal of our thinking and attitudes. The more we see things as God sees them, the easier it is to recognize his will and follow it. As we pray, read the Sacred Scriptures, and seek to live a sacramental life, the Holy Spirit will renew our minds and help us to see everything through truly Catholic eyes.

(CCC 1076, 1085-1084, 1088, 1166-1167, 1171-1178, 1524, 1374, 1378-1382, 1584-1589, 1391-1398, 1457-1458, 1674-1676, 2050, 2042, 2685, 2689, 2691, 2708)

“Having a sacramental outlook means seeing the whole of life through Catholic lenses.”



A military chaplain celebrating Mass on the wing of an Air Force jet

COURTESY OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF THE MILITARY SERVICES, USA

Holiness and Joy

*Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.
God, the Lord, is my strength. ~ Habakkuk 3:18-19*

JESUS TELLS us that we “*must be perfect, as [our] Heavenly*

Father is perfect” (Mt 5:48). Many people think that achieving this perfection, attaining true holiness, takes the happiness out of life, and that those who actively pursue sanctity are wet blankets who are hard to live with. These beliefs are exactly the opposite of the truth. Holiness is the wellspring of freedom, peace, and a deep inner joy.

When we see our lives in real terms, as God sees things, we realize that we are transient — here today, gone tomorrow. We are here on earth to live a good life, but the purpose of this good life is to gain an eternal reward. We know from observation that people who live as though there is no tomorrow are not truly free, at peace, or happy. Fleeting pleasure and self-gratification, in a world destined to perish, cannot compare to an eternity of peace and joy with our God.

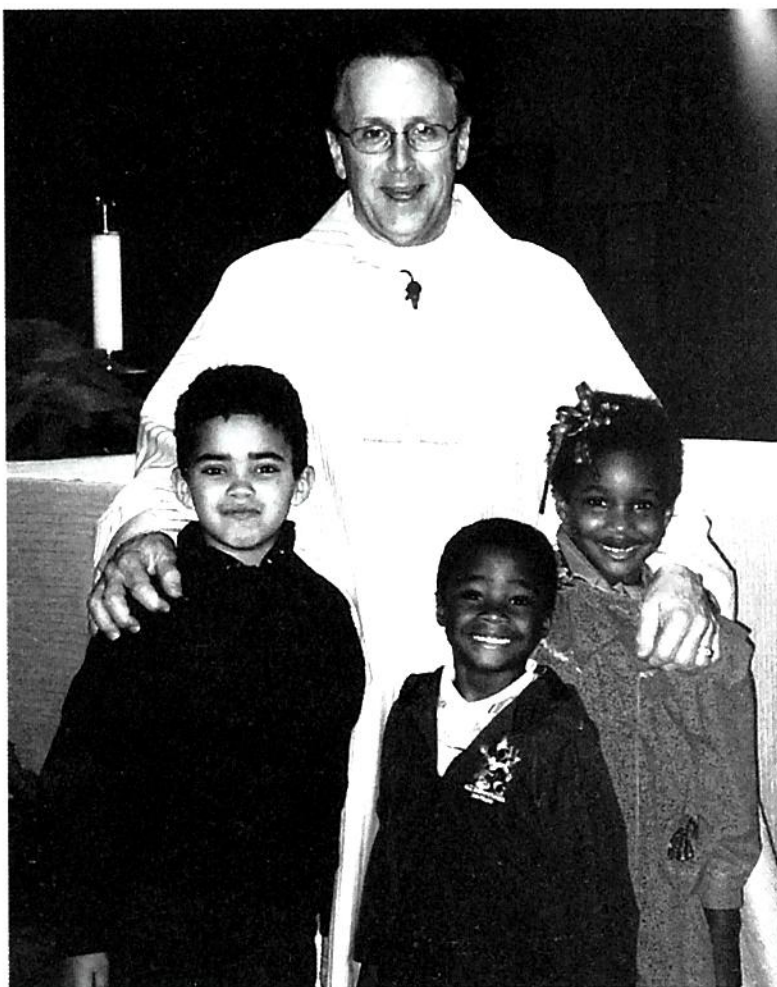
The way we seek happiness makes all the

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difference. Our nature, wounded by sin, makes us likely to succumb to the temptation to put emphasis upon things that contribute little to our real purpose for living. Yet Jesus plainly tells us, “*seek first [the] Kingdom [of God] and his righteousness*” (Mt 6:33). Without fail, this gives us an abiding and intense joy: “*Without having seen him you love him; though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy*” (1 Pt 1:8).

But what about the pain, suffering, and grief that

life brings? A life of holiness can have sorrow, trials, and tribulations. Yet this is also true of those who do not seek holiness. Jesus teaches us that we must “*take up [our] cross and follow [him]*” (Mk 8:34). This is not an option; holiness comes by way of the cross, and those who are closest to Jesus do not get a “pass” from the slings and arrows of life. In fact, the effort to become holy requires the deliberate sacrifice of earthly things, transient things. Yet sacrifice and self-denial need not mean sadness. Jesus also



*“A life of holiness can have sorrow,
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said: *“These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full”* (Jn 15:11). In human terms, a cross is not itself a delight; it means trial and grief. But it is, nevertheless, the source of joy: *“[Y]ou will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy”* (Jn 16:20). To explain this, Jesus speaks of a mother’s birth pangs that turn to joy when her child is finally born (see Jn 16:21).

Those intent on sanctity know how to understand their troubles and keep their eyes on their goal. Knowing that they are doing the right things, they feel a keen sense of freedom and their souls are possessed of peace. The Scriptures tell us to *“serve the Lord with gladness”* (Ps 100:2). The true Christian disciple also finds joy in bringing others to the love and service of God, for joy cannot be hidden, but must be shared: *“For I greatly rejoiced when some of the brethren arrived and testified to the truth of your life, as indeed you do follow the truth. No greater joy can I have than this, to hear that my children follow the truth”* (5 Jn vv 3-4).

Why, then, is there such a widespread notion that holy people — “living saints” — are sour killjoys? Sadly, many so-called “saints” are actually self-righteous, sanctimonious people convinced of their own virtue and of their superiority to everyone around them. Self-righteousness is another name for pride, the kind of pride that Jesus condemned when he told the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. The Pharisee prayed: *“God, I thank thee that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adul-*

terers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I get” (Lk 18:11-12). These people give a bad name to sanctity and do great evil by giving others a false view of what true holiness is and thereby discouraging them from seeking it. In the same parable, Jesus tells us that *“the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to Heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’”* (Lk 18:15). Holiness requires knowing that one is a sinner and begging God daily for mercy.

It is not difficult to know when one has encountered a saint. The saint is the person who makes us think longingly, “I want whatever he, or she, has.” This is joy — true joy — and every holy person has it.

(CCC 425, 1721-1722, 2013, 2015)

