

Duties of Sons and Daughters



HE SACRED HEART OF JESUS promised St. Margaret Mary that He would give those consecrated to Him *all the graces necessary in their state of life*. At Lourdes and Fatima, we have been commanded to do *Penance! Penance!* To clarify this repeated threefold request, His Majesty later came to Sr. Lucia, saying: *"the sacrifice required for every person is the fulfillment of his duties in life and the observance of My law. This is the penance that I now seek and require."* Many fail to complete this penance because they do not know their duties beyond those basic ones owed to God and His Church as indicated in the Ten Commandments and the Precepts of the Church. Here, then, is a summary of the social duties for sons and daughters according to reliable moral handbooks and catechisms, but principally from the writings of St. Peter Julian Eymard (cf. *Eucharistic Handbook*).

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is just. Honor thy father and thy mother, which is the first commandment with a promise: that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest be long lived upon earth" (Eph. 6:1-3).

"Honor thy father, and forget not the groanings of thy mother: Remember that thou hadst not been born but through them: and make a return to them as they have done for thee" (Ecclus. 7:29-30).



FTER GOD, the primary debt of filial piety is owed to one's parents; but in a secondary way it includes brothers, sisters, grandparents as well as more distant relatives. Filial piety is the virtue inclining man to render parents and other members of the family, each in their proper place, the love, honor and service due to them. Society's basic social unit, the family, is the field of operation for filial piety. This virtue, then, seeks to protect the natural rights of those living within the family circle, that they suffer no harm from others within or without that same circle. It follows that every venial sin of hatred, ill-will, and contempt directed against those outside the family circle very easily becomes mortal when the same sin is directed against one's own parents or family. What is more, in such cases a double sin is incurred, since impiety is added to the sin of the bad action itself.

Filial piety imposes upon man four obligations, of both natural and divine law, due primarily to his parents precisely as they assume the parental role: (1) the *service of love*, because children are closely united to

their parents by a most special relationship, for after God, parents are the source of man's existence and his greatest benefactors; (2) *honor and reverence*, due to their dignity and excellence as superiors; (3) *obedience*, because they are the divinely appointed guides of their children; (4) and at times, when necessity urges, *spiritual and material assistance*.

The obligation of love and assistance. – Children are bound to love their parents second only to God. It is natural for man to love his father and mother; they are the joy of his life. Faith presents parents to the Christian children as the representatives of the power

and goodness of God. Thus, faith enjoins the Christian child to love them with a supernatural love, that is, a love which is not only internal but also external. A mere external show of love without the inner affection of the heart is insufficient. Apart from an external display, there must be an inner act of willing them their greatest good, namely eternal salvation. This authentic love, therefore, must be forthcoming at all times. Material and spiritual assistance, on the other hand, are due only when necessity demands.

In order to be genuine, this filial love, both external and internal, should have three qualities. It ought to be *respectful, submissive and devoted*.

Respectful love. – Respect is the first proof of filial piety. Love without

respect is merely a form of self-love, akin to disdain. Respect is the faithful keeper of love, its crown of honor and glory. In the presence of his parents, the faithful Christian child should therefore strictly avoid all disrespect or trivial talk, which he would not use in the presence of one he honors and highly esteems; he should avoid every impolite or uncouth action which he would not do before an honorable person. Common examples include not interrupting parents when they are speaking, not attempting to correct them, never back-talking, not rolling one's eyes at their instructions, never feigning deafness towards their commands, etc. Good sons or daughters will especially strive to honor their parents in the presence of others. Their personal honor imposes this as a duty, and God imposes it as an absolute commandment: *Thou shalt honor thy father and thy mother*.

Submissive love. – His Majesty, Our Lord Jesus Christ, lived for nearly 30 years under obedience to His holy parents Joseph and the ever Virgin Mary. The Gospel reveals the perfection of His obedience: *"And He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was*



subject to them" (Luke 2:51). Obedience was His life.

The measure of a child's love for his parents is directly proportional to his willingness to obey them. Selfishness, even a fierce insistence upon one's own will, is one of the earliest and most powerful manifestations of malice and concupiscence in children. In accordance with their age and abilities, children should therefore make a continual (daily) and concerted effort to *joyfully* submit their will to their parents in all just things. Fidelity in obedience is an essential foundation for good character and growth in holiness. The child who fails to become proficient in submissive love nearly always grows into an indulgent, self-centered, and vice-ridden adult.

Devoted love. – A good and faithful Christian child should make family life a priority, second only to God. A devoted love means finding joy and fulfillment within the family and seeking the flourishing of the family, even at the cost of self-sacrifice. The child with a devoted love will shun all those pleasures of which his parents do not approve. He should reject all friendships that would monopolize his time and his affections at the expense of filial piety. His chief natural happiness should be to live under the parental roof; his chief natural pleasure, to lavish tender and affectionate care on his parents. Appropriate words and gestures of devoted love and care towards them should be part of the child's daily life. In the hour of suffering and of trial, he should always be their comfort and their strength.

Children are bound to assist their parents when they are in need. So strict is this obligation that a son or daughter would be obliged to defer marriage or entrance into the religious life to come to their assistance. The possible needs that might arise defy cataloguing, ranging as they do from food and clothing to visiting them when ill or comforting them in their sorrow. Furthermore, children should come to the spiritual aid of their parents (e.g., by warning them of approaching death if they are seriously ill, by providing the necessary Sacraments, by ensuring a Catholic funeral and burial, and by praying for the repose of their souls in death, most especially by having Masses offered for this purpose). *"Son, support the old age of thy father, and grieve him not in his life; and if his understanding fail, have patience with him, and despise him not when thou art in thy strength: for the relieving of the father shall not be forgotten"* (Eccl. 3:14-15).

Happy the faithful child who glories in serving his parents with no other return than the love of duty, with no other desire than to do them good, with no other hope than the hope of God. He will not be the loser for acting thus; for a godly family is a priceless treasure, honor a great wealth, and filial devotedness a

most edifying virtue.

Children, however, sin gravely *through a lack of interior love* when they hate or despise their parents interiorly; when they rejoice in their adversity, or sorrow over their prosperity; and when they hope for the death of their parents in order to be free from their control or enjoy an inheritance.

Similarly, it would be seriously sinful if children *through a lack of exterior love* were to manifest hatred toward their parents by revealing their serious shortcomings, by insulting them grievously (e.g., laughing at them, by calling them injurious names, mimicking them), or by causing them grave sorrow and worry (e.g., associating with evil company, neglect of study, keeping late hours). The child who shows such a lack of respect for his parents must restore and repair their wounded honor by asking their pardon before those in whose presence he insulted them. It is also gravely sinful for a child to strike or injure his parents out of anger or with a violent intent. A child should never willfully hurt his parents physically, emotionally or spiritually. *"Of what an evil fame is he that forsaketh his father: and he is cursed of God that angereth his mother"* (Eccl. 3:18).



The obligation of reverence and honor. – Reverence toward parents demands that children not only give interior acknowledgment of their parents' God given dignity and authority, but also that they manifest this attitude in their external deportment. Refusing to speak to one's father or mother, making foul faces, sarcastic remarks, and being ashamed to have them about when friends stop by, are examples of violations against this virtue.

St. Ambrose exclaims: "How much has not thy mother suffered on thy account! How many sleepless nights, how many privations, how much anxiety has she not borne for thee! How hard thy father has worked, to provide thee with food and raiment! And canst thou be ungrateful to those who have done and suffered so much for thee?"

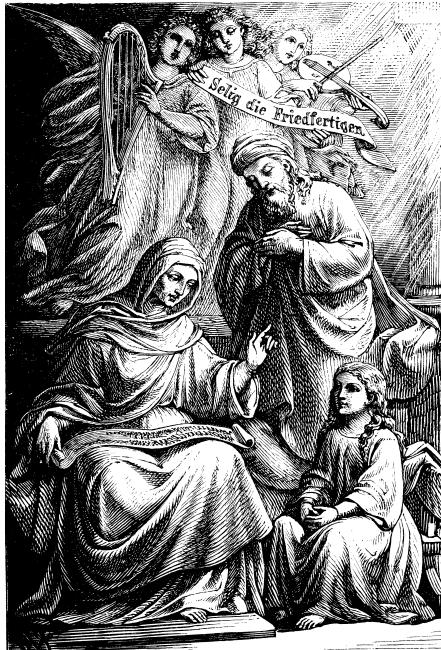
The obligation of obedience. – When a child truly embraces his obligations to love, reverence and honor his parents, he also respectfully and dutifully obeys them. He obeys their commands, has filial fear of their authority, as well as gratitude for their material, intellectual and moral assistance. St. Paul instructs: *"Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing to the Lord"* (Col 3:20), unless, of course, what is asked is contrary to God the Father, *"We ought to obey God rather than men"* (Acts 5:29). We do well to remember that all paternity comes from God the Father (cf. Eph 3:15), hence *all* authority is subject and subordinate to His authority.

The obligation to love and honor one's parents' never ceases. The obligation to assist one's parents ceases when their needs end. But the obligation to obey one's parents' commands ceases when a child reaches the age of his majority, when he undertakes to live independently, or when he marries. Yet, how fitting that he would still seek counsel from his parents even as an adult. As long as a son or daughter remains in the home of his or her parents, however, he or she is obliged to submit to all the household directives of the parents, no matter the age or condition of the child. Any child who is earning income while living at home should also contribute from these earnings for the maintenance of the home, unless the parents do not need or require it.

Whenever parents firmly command a child in a serious matter, it is ordinarily mortally sinful to disobey. Serious matter touches upon whatever might cause grave harm either to the child or the family, that is, disobedience which would result in immorality, grave danger to salvation, or notable danger to temporal goods or family honor. Such matters involve the spiritual or physical life of the family and its members, and are therefore mortal, death dealing, when acted upon. To refuse to attend Mass or to receive the sacraments (and by extension to refuse to pray with the family), to neglect study to the extent that one fails in school, to disgrace the family by associating with bad companions, to "sneak" out of the house after hours, to violate parent's prudential norms regarding courting or "keeping company" all constitute grave sins against obedience.

All that has been said here concerning obedience applies equally to permanent guardians or foster parents. The right of parents to obedience, respect and honor is shared in a secondary manner by school administrators and teachers. Parents implicitly communicate to these individuals a share of their own divinely given authority to direct and govern their children. Consequently, classroom disturbances, insulting and insolent behavior and discourtesy to instructors and disciplinarians, purposely not paying attention in class, and misuse of study time, all are highly offensive to filial piety.

Duties at home. – Home duties ought to be dear to the heart of the Christian son and daughter. God made of these duties the first law of the love of neighbor. Charity always starts at home. How children fulfill obligations at home will later determine how they will do so in their own future families or religious vocations.



Duties as a sibling. – Friendship among brothers and sisters is meant to be abiding and strong. In order to be Christian, this friendship should be based on virtue, most especially charity.

On charity. – Charity, says St. Paul, is sweet, patient and benevolent. *Sweet* in that charity avoids everything that savors of ill-humor or of animosity. *Patient* in that charity bears quietly with the weaknesses of age, with the natural defects of brothers and sisters. *Benevolent* in that charity seeks the good of the sibling as much as its own; it procures the good for them with simplicity and joy. Charity is the love of friendship, says St. Thomas. It always seeks what is best for the other, ever wishing him well, even at the cost of some self-sacrifice. It is ever vigilant, looking for an opportunity to help or do some act of kindness to the other.

On virtue. – The friendship that is based on natural sentiment or sympathy alone will not last long, and will seldom do the son or daughter much good, since it lacks supernatural motive and gains not merits. It is supernatural virtue alone that gives to friendship its life and power. This virtue ought to be self-denying in everything that is not wrong or that is merely a matter of preference. It ought to be benevolent and considerate in its dealings, affectionate in the services rendered, and disinterested in its sacrifices, doing good out of love not out of self interest. It ought to be devoted, particularly in matters of salvation, using prayer, sacrifices and admonitions, and having no peace or rest until a brother or sister in danger of perdition has returned to the Church and Her Sacraments.

Brothers in particular should ever seek to protect and guard the virtue of their sisters, always avoiding any unhealthy familiarity and always treating them with the respect due to women, for surely as they treat their sisters now will have some bearing on how they will treat their own wives in the future.

Sisters, for their part, should strive to be modest and gentle, not allowing themselves to be imperious nor becoming "one of the boys." Such should be the virtue of sons and daughters in order to be perfect.

In regards to modesty the Catechism teaches: "Modesty protects the intimate center of the person. It means refusing to unveil what should remain hidden... Modesty is decency. It inspires one's choice of clothing. It keeps silence or reserve where there is evident risk of unhealthy curiosity. It is discreet... Modesty inspires a way of life which makes it possible to resist the allurements of fashion and the pressure of prevailing ideologies."

Pope Pius XII once said: "There is nothing wrong in being fashionable. But, fashion can never be the

supreme rule of conduct. There is a limit beyond which fashion can bring about the ruin of a soul." And in another place, he taught: "modesty foresees threatening danger, forbids us to expose ourselves to risks, demands the avoidance of those occasions which the imprudent do not shun. It does not like impure or loose talk, it shrinks from the slightest immodesty, it carefully avoids suspect familiarity with persons of the other sex, since it brings the soul to show due reverence to the body, as being a member of Christ and the temple of the Holy Ghost. He who possesses the treasure of Christian modesty abominates every sin of impurity and instantly flees whenever he is tempted by its seductions" (*Sacra Virginitas*, no. 58).

Choice of a vocation. — The choice of the state of life is a most serious and important matter for a young person. On this choice depends his happiness in this life and in the next. The salvation of any man is best procured by embracing the vocation God has chosen for him. It is therefore a young person's duty to examine carefully, in due time, the vocation to which God in His goodness calls him, examining his fitness for it and his natural inclinations. But in selecting his vocation he must, above all, take his salvation into account. Part of his patient and prudent discernment will necessarily include consulting his parents, as well as a wise and experienced priestly director, and *much* prayer.

Once he has determined God's will for him and has embraced this future vocation, he should prepare himself for it by practicing the specific virtues required to adorn and perfect it.

If a professional career is being considered, then the young person ought to devote himself to it with constancy, work at it with unity of purpose, sanctify study with piety, and inform science with virtue.

If he chooses a commercial, industrial, military or other such career, let him realize that he will need much strength of character to overcome the first difficulties, and unflinching courage to resist the dangers and scandals of a society that is often impious and corrupt. The best career is the one which is spent close to a wise father, a good mother, and if possible, pious siblings. The life of a young person in the midst of his family is like the course of an abundant stream which brings life and joy to the whole countryside.

If our Lord calls the son or daughter to the more sublime vocation of complete dedication to Christ's Holy Church, whether to the priesthood for the son or the religious life for either, they each ought to rejoice

exceedingly over this divine gift. But let them purify their intentions and put their vocation to the test, and not be surprised if their parents test them in this regard. Let them have frequent recourse to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Again, it is essential to consult a faithful priest in seeking to confirm and to fulfill these vocations with all humility and confidence.

If, on the contrary, the young person perceives holy matrimony as his calling and place in life, and he is blessed with Christian parents concerned about his welfare and eternal salvation, let him not be remiss in consulting them and allowing them to guide him by their prudent counsel. Then let him pray fervently, and God will bless him.



As standards for the choice of a spouse, the young person should above all prefer spiritual qualities to natural talents and abilities, he should value character above wealth, status, and possessions, and he should prefer virtue to a perishable beauty. Nevertheless, he must also take into account compatibility at the natural level, for example, culture, personality, temperament, and mutual expectations. To be happy, he must be able to have a life-long esteem for the person with whom he should live in a state of mutual and Christian affection.

When courting others, it is important to study and follow the rules of courting, and to recognize that emotions are likely to play a strong role in finding a spouse. Since emotions often blur our vision, it is very fitting for the young person to consult his parents about the fitness of this or that person being considered as a future spouse.

"He that honoureth his father shall have joy in his own children" (Eccl. 3:6). A great reward is often granted to those children who strive to fulfill these duties: they in turn are given grateful and pleasing children. *"With what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again"* (Matt. 7:2).

AT FATIMA, the angel depicted in the vision part of the Third Secret repeated the request of Our Lady of Lourdes: *Penance! Penance! Penance!* With this penance performed, the heavenly Queen is depicted in the same vision as putting out the flames of God's wrath coming upon the world! If sons and daughters do penance according to their duties of state, they will surely be aided by God's grace in all their endeavors and receive the protection of the Sacred and Immaculate Hearts against all dangers, as well as help Our Lady in fulfilling the Fatima promises... *"In the end, My Immaculate Heart with triumph."*