

# Catechist Background

## Commandments # 4-6 for Catechists

### Honoring Our Parents (Fourth Commandment)

By Kathy Coffey

"Honor your father and your mother..." (Exodus 20:12).

We turn from the first three commandments, regarding relationships between God and humans, towards the next four, which focus on relationships among people.

What nugget of wisdom does the Fourth Commandment teach us? Today some parents and children are estranged; others wish their parents were alive to honor them. But the following story shows how delightfully some children still honor their parents.

Jan celebrated her 60th birthday with friends, far from her children who lived in five different states. But she had told her kids, "No gifts. All I need are memories of you." Then the postal service delivered a special box. Within it were 60 small pieces of paper, on which Jan's children had written 60 special memories. She read and cherished each one with a mixture of laughter and tears.

While we can only speculate what motivated Jan's children, we can ask ourselves: Why honor our parents? In the world of the Bible and in the best homes today, parents provide the images of trust, hope and serenity that enable the young to face formidable obstacles ahead. To their children they convey the message, whether spoken or unspoken, "You are loved. You are wonderful."

All human beings are constantly making the passage from the known to the unknown. Parents who have endured disappointment, even tragedy, can help their offspring travel that passage with dignity. "We've made mistakes," they say. "We've lost jobs, or health, or our dearest loves. But it didn't kill us. Something in human beings endures. Something continues to trust. Something moves forward in confidence."

### Related Roles

Furthermore, parents are the keepers of memory. When their children hit snags, they remind them what glorious people they most deeply are, recalling their finest selves. And if humor, perspective or home cooking can lighten a load, they contribute it.

In *Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood*, Rebecca Wells recounts a long, serious mother-daughter rift which begins to heal when the mother sends her daughter Sidda in the Pacific Northwest her famous crayfish etouffe from Louisiana. "With each bite, Sidda tasted her homeland and her mother's love."

The wisest parents honor their children in turn. They count on their children's good sense to pilot them through difficulties, so they restrain the "free advice." They clarify the boundaries of their role: providing safe harbors, but not holding the ropes too tightly. They encourage children to explore God's large and beautiful world, not burdening the young with unnecessary fear or anxiety. Wisely, they recognize the arenas where the young have more expertise (computers, iPods and anything technical), inviting them to shine there.

Many parents struggle with handing on their faith to a generation that seems, at best, unenthusiastic about it. There too, honor comes in. Realizing that the gift of faith, no matter how important it is, cannot be coerced or controlled, parents can follow the advice of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton. Agonizing over her sons' shenanigans she once said, "What's a mother to do but pray and dote, pray and dote?"

If the roles of parent and child seem too idealized, we need only look to Jesus and his mother for role models. (Unfortunately, Scripture records little of Jesus' relationship with Joseph.)

### Learning From Jesus and Mary

The wedding at Cana provides the perfect example of their honoring each other. Mary wisely tells Jesus of the need: "They have no wine." Then she backs off. She trusts his instincts to resolve the crisis.

Despite his reservations ("My hour has not yet come"), Jesus in turn honors his mother. Whether he was responding to her, or to the couple's dire need, we may never know. Despite the exhaustion and pain of his passion, Jesus continued to honor Mary, making sure even from the cross that his beloved disciple would continue to care for her (John 19:26-27).

In Jesus' day, women who had no son or husband to protect them often became desperate beggars. Knowing that sad reality, Jesus makes sure that John will take her into his own home. St. Ignatius imagined that the first appearance of Jesus after the Resurrection, although not recorded in Scripture, must surely have been to Mary.

As parents and children who follow Jesus, we are called to do likewise.

*Kathy Coffey, the mother of four, is an editor at Living the Good News in Denver, Colorado. She has won numerous writing awards. Her newest book is Women of Mercy (Orbis, 2005).*

### Questions for Reflection:

- What do you think are the best ways for children to honor their parents?
- What are the best ways for parents to honor their children?

## Honoring Each Other

*By Judith Dunlap*

The best way for children to learn to honor their father and mother is to witness how their mother and father honor each other. I learned from my own parents to always show respect for my husband. In all of my growing-up years, I never heard my mom or dad speak one word against the other. And my siblings and I certainly were not allowed to speak disrespectfully to or about them.

We were never allowed to call my mother "she" or my dad "he." My dad (a native of Poland) told us that many languages had a distinct pronoun to use when speaking to people we were to respect. English was not one of those languages. The same pronoun, "he" or "she," is used to refer to a common thief or a highly respected elder. Therefore, Mom was always Mom, and Dad was always Dad. It was a habit my sisters and I learned at an early age. It was something my husband and I tried to teach our own children.

Parents also show respect for each other by making a point of demonstrating a united front. Children learn at an early age whom to go to when they want certain things. And by the time they have reached early adolescence, they have learned the technique of "divide and conquer." It is important for parents not to let their guard down.

After a few years of being married (or perhaps working through shared custody), as parents you know what issues you tend to disagree about. Don't let your children take advantage of this knowledge. Consult with each other often. Learn to ask if they have already consulted their other parent. Whether children know it or not, they need to have parents who back each other up, and they need parents who show respect for each other.

### For Family Response:

Name other people besides parents who deserve to be honored. Talk about different ways to show respect to people who deserve to be honored.

## Respecting All Life (Fifth Commandment)

By John Feister

*Fifth Commandment: "You shall not kill" (Exodus 20:13).*

I've stood as an adult at life's portals several times: once each at the birth of my sons, watching, encouraging, witnessing; again at the bedside of my mother as she passed into life hereafter.

All were transition times: My sons surely were alive well before their birthdays; most parents can tell you that there are plenty of signs of life from the outset. At the other portal, I witnessed my mother's passing with a sense of awe as she continued her journey to life everlasting.

When I consider those times, I am reminded of Jesus' words in John's Gospel: "I came so that they might have life, and have it more abundantly" (10:10). That positive promise of life is the way I approach the Fifth Commandment, "You shall not kill." It is a prohibition to be sure, but, like all of the other commandments, it is there to allow us to live to the fullest the life that God gives us.

We people have a sad history of ignoring the promise of life from the earliest times—the story of Cain and Abel (see Genesis 4:8-12) tells us that. But one could argue that respect for life never has been a more urgent issue than it is today. In his 1995 encyclical, *The Gospel of Life*, the late Pope John Paul II named our culture's lack of respect for life as one of the signs of our times.

When we talk of living life abundantly, the deepest meaning of "You shall not kill," we're talking about birth and natural death, but we're talking about much more. We're talking about openly and actively opposing abortion, but we're also talking about fighting all of those other things that take life away.

## Global Solidarity

Anyone who has worked in the Third World, or among the poor in our own United States, has witnessed how social poverty takes away life and how our culture can strip human dignity, that is, take away respect for life by allowing or even causing poverty.

A January 2007 TV documentary by Maryknoll films, *Lives for Sale*, shows a growth in human slavery—in the United States—related to the injustices surrounding immigration from Mexico and Latin America. It is the story of powerless people being sold into bondage.

Being "pro-life," that is, against death, includes standing in solidarity with those who are powerless, from "womb to tomb." It is among the brightest witnesses of the Church that acts of solidarity are everywhere in the good works of people building houses, working at soup kitchens, staffing pregnancy centers, opposing the death penalty, advocating for just laws and policies, to name a few. All of these ways honor the Fifth Commandment.

The "culture of death" as John Paul called it, dishonors God. Taking of life medically by euthanasia, for example, puts us in the driver's seat reserved for God. God's command, "You shall not kill," gives us a grave responsibility to avoid war.

Catholics believe, of course, that there are times of legitimate self-defense, when killing is unavoidable and ethically allowable. But nations, including our own, often cut a broader swath, resorting to war when war is not justified. Pope Benedict XVI, for example, has clearly condemned our military intervention in Iraq. At the same time, how many thousands, on all sides, have lost their lives! How many millions have died from abortion, genocide and poverty!

## Words of Life

It is the teachers of the Church, the bishops, who have framed the challenge of the Fifth Commandment so effectively for our times. An American, our own late Cardinal Joseph L. Bernardin, introduced the concept of "a consistent ethic of life" as a way to tie together all of the life issues that challenge us today. In *The Gospel of Life*, Pope John Paul II speaks of consistency: "Where life is involved, the service of charity must be profoundly consistent... human life is sacred and inviolable at every stage and in every situation... We need, then, to 'show care' for all life and for the life of everyone" (#87).

Jesus taught us that all of the Commandments are about being in right relationship with God and neighbor (see Matthew 22:34-40). In an age where we people can assert all manner of new and wonderful creativity and control over creation, the Fifth

Commandment reminds us of the only true author: It is God, the giver of life, who calls us to have life, and have it more abundantly.

*John Feister is an assistant editor of St. Anthony Messenger, managing editor of Catholic Update and director of Electronic Media at St. Anthony Messenger Press.*

### Questions for Reflection:

- What do you think Cardinal Bernardin meant when he referred to "a consistent ethic of life"?
- What does it mean to have life abundantly?

## FAMILY CORNER

### Halting 'Virtual' Violence

*By Judith Dunlap*

Ever since my grandson Jake turned 10, I have had opportunities (several Christmases and birthdays) to peruse the electronic game section of our local toy store. Good grief! Just the pictures on the covers of some of the games gave me the chills. I know they were marked for teens and older children, but that is no reassurance. Jake turned 13 this year, and in no way is he old enough to handle the graphic violence some of those covers depicted. At least I hope not.

While the correlation between violent behavior and violent video games is being debated across the country, there is one thing we know for sure: Youngsters are being desensitized to the significance of pointing a gun at another human being, shooting him until he is a bloody pulp and then cheering about it with friends.

A study in 2005, conducted undercover by young unaccompanied children, revealed that 42 percent of them had no difficulty buying videos and games marked "M" for mature audiences. The results of two dozen recent surveys suggest that while violent games increase aggressive thoughts in young people, they do not necessarily increase aggressive behavior. Frankly, as a grandmother and a Christian, even an increase in aggressive thoughts gives me concern.

How is this increase in aggressive thoughts going to affect our youngsters? If, thankfully, these thoughts aren't being played out, what happens to them? I remember the anger and pent-up frustration of my own teen years. How does increased aggression affect a teen's attitude and his or her relationships to others?

"Virtual" killing may not be a sin against the Fifth Commandment, but its impact on a young person's general character is questionable. The early years are a time to practice choosing between good and bad, and video games that involve killing others are not good.

### For Family Response:

Talk about what games might be appropriate substitutes for video games.

## Celebrating Faithfulness (Sixth Commandment)

By Kathy Coffey

*"You shall not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14).*

Of all the commandments, this is one of the most ignored in the Old Testament. The understanding of marriage in the Hebrew Scriptures is quite different from ours. Just consider Solomon's 700 wives!

One Old Testament story most clearly shows the web of deceit and the chain of unintended consequences adultery can provoke. David's desire for Bathsheba is so intense that it forces him to arrange the murder of her husband, Uriah. The union of the king with the beautiful woman (*before* Uriah's death) leads to the illness of their first child, David's intense fasting and prayer, and then the child's death (2 Sam 11—12). The cost of their affair is terrible.

If the story ended there, it would be a cautionary tale, sending a loud message about the evils of adultery. But the plot twist comes through the surprising mercy of God. The second child this couple conceives is Solomon, Israel's revered king and the great-great-grandfather of Jesus. When the crowd waved palm branches and hailed Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, they called him "Son of David"—David the adulterer.

Jesus as Son of God and Son of Man blends two natures: the divine, which is splendid beyond understanding, and the human, which can get us snarled in lies, infidelity and murder. Because Jesus is our brother, we too carry the same tension: At times we're lofty and transcendent, at other times, low and deceitful.

The Sixth Commandment calls us to the best we can be: loyal, committed, full of integrity.

We have been criticized as a "Kleenex culture," in which everything, including a spouse, gets easily tossed away. We work harder at our careers than at our marriages, then wonder why, after time elapses, couples become strangers, easily disposable. Adultery usually occurs only after the marriage has begun to disintegrate.

### Shelter for Each Other

Remaining faithful and loving throughout a long marriage is one of a human being's finest accomplishments. We can get dewy-eyed and romantic about a wedding. The bride and groom—young, slim and attractive—represent hope and potential. We want their happiness, gift them lavishly and pray for abundant blessings on them.

We should celebrate a silver or golden anniversary with the same vigor. The couple may be bent and pudgy, but they have woven a life together, composed of countless stresses, joys, failures, delights, arguments, illnesses, laughter and achievements. They have talked through many issues and survived innumerable crises.

They have negotiated finances, lifestyles, household duties and parenting. They have survived a thousand strains and made a million connections. The tie that binds them is a strong fabric made of tiny threads. They know—daily and directly—the role named in the Beatitudes: "Blessed are the peacemakers." As the Irish say, they become "the shelter for each other." In a world of constant change and often chaos, people need such permanent anchors.

Adultery short-circuits this learning curve. People who flee at the first serious argument don't learn that there is more to their union than one disagreement. A fresh face may at first seem to carry less baggage than the spouse, but adultery misses the chance to grow old with the same person who knows and accepts our baggage intimately. A long marriage is a school where human beings apprentice, gradually becoming less selfish.

### Models of God's Presence

Experts on marriage say that when we make a vow, we offer ourselves the way we cup water in our hands. Adultery not only harms the other person, but also undermines the best we are: When the vow is broken, the water spills out of our hands. Remaining faithful enables us to be like God, whose compassion never wavers and whose presence weathers all storms.

A story about an Alzheimer's patient in a care center ties the bow to complete this consideration of fidelity. A nurse said compassionately to a husband who traveled a great distance to visit his wife, the patient: "You really don't need to come every day. She doesn't know you." "Ah," replied the husband. "But I know her."

May our following of this commandment bring us all to that kind of commitment.

Kathy Coffey, the mother of four, is an editor at *Living the Good News in Denver, Colorado*. She has won numerous writing awards. Her newest book is *The Art of Faith* (Twenty-Third Publications, 2007).

### Questions for Reflection:

- What do you think are the factors that contribute to the lack of respect for the vows taken in marriage?
- How can a person or family build up immunity to those factors?

## FAMILY CORNER

### Early Marriage Preparation

By Judith Dunlap

In my *Baltimore Catechism* I learned that the Sixth Commandment forbids "all impurities and immodesties in words, looks and actions." So, when I was 10 years old I went to Confession and confessed to committing adultery twice. After a couple of muffled guffaws, the priest asked me to explain. Blushing to the core, I told him I had looked at some postcards with women in skimpy swimsuits.

Our religious education programs do a much better job of preparing youngsters for Confession today. Words are given their proper meaning with fuller explanations, and definitions are given that are age-appropriate. However, it is important to remember that while our Catholic schools and parish religious education programs can teach children what the commandments mean, it is up to their parents to teach them how to live them.

We prepare our children to be faithful in marriage by helping them understand three things: commitment, sacrifice and the meaning of love. They learn commitment by following through on the promises they make in their earliest years. If they sign up for soccer, they play until the end of the season. If they take up the tuba, they remain part of the band for the entire school year.

We teach our children about sacrifice when we encourage them to let someone else go first or to give the bigger piece of chocolate to a friend. We teach them about love when we help them understand that love is more than a feeling. Even when they don't particularly like their siblings, there is still a bond of love that unites them.

Of course the best way to teach our children about being faithful is to be faithful to them in our everyday commitments and sacrifices as parents—and by making sure they know we still love them, even when they are least likable.

### For Family Response:

Ask family members to talk about a time when they remained faithful to a commitment they were tempted to give up.

## Commandments #7-10 for Catechists

*Background  
Informator*

### Hidden Forms of Theft (Seventh Commandment)

By Kathy Coffey

*"You shall not steal" (Exodus 20:15).*

Whew!" we might first think. "Got off easy on that one!" We law-abiding sorts don't pilfer office supplies, skim money from the collection plate, shoplift jewelry, pick pockets or rob banks. At last, this is one commandment we're handily observing, right?

Right—if we stick to the letter of the law. But the commandments are demanding, calling us beyond superficial observance to deeper reflection. There are more forms of stealing than we might initially recognize. Let's look first at homegrown forms, then at the larger picture of social justice.

In arenas close to home, we rob our children or spouses of hours together when we work overtime at a job that often buys more than necessities; it buys luxuries (the second TV set, pizza delivery, PalmPilot, iPod, etc.).

The Church has long taught that economic concerns cannot be the primary drivers of human life. The person created by God is too precious to be merely a means of profit. Our birthright as God's children is dignity, security, the divine, transcendent love. All that matters most is gift. So why do we hoard lesser things?

We steal a person's enthusiasm or innocence by negative comments. We squash plans that seem naïve, quell a child's natural curiosity or creativity, stifle the initiative of the new employee. Unfounded fears can block imaginative solutions and, even worse, the inspiration of the Spirit. When we fritter away our time on games and television, we rob the bright potential of the intellect.

Two forms of theft reduce the immediacy of the present: if we are consumed with anxiety about the future, or dwell too much in memories of the past. Either extreme robs the current moment of all the grace and potential for God's revelation.

#### **It's Not Just About Us**

The items in closets or drawers that don't fit or are no longer worn—these too are stolen from those who could be using them, who might in fact be thrilled to have them. As St. Basil reminds us: "The coat in your closet belongs to the naked. The shoes rotting in your basement belong to the barefoot."

Our property and talents do not belong only to us, but were given by God for the benefit of others. Here, as everywhere, our model is Christ, who "though he was rich, yet for your sake...became poor so that by his poverty, you might become rich" (2 Cor 8:9).

A look through the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reveals social dimensions of this commandment, condemning: the payment of unjust wages, bribes to legislators, breaking a contract and "work poorly done." Furthermore, discrimination against women and immigrants which denies them job access violates the Seventh Commandment. Interestingly, the *Catechism* denies that theft occurs when one needs essentials desperately (#2408-9)—as for instance, when people sought food and water after Hurricane Katrina.

How the foundations of Las Vegas or Atlantic City would tremble to hear its words: "The passion for gambling risks becoming an enslavement" (#2413). Intuitively we may cringe at the busloads of people pumping their savings into slot machines.

So too, people who lavish more money and attention on their pets than some children receive aren't exercising proper stewardship: "One can love animals; one should not direct to them the affection due only to persons" (#2418).

On a global scale, the arms race plunders the resources of the planet, substituting weapons for people's basic needs. Dwight Eisenhower warned in 1961 that the military-industrial complex could bleed our country's riches—and he was prophetic.

### **Paying Back**

To conclude on a bright note: Many people are making efforts at reparation. Corporate pollution may steal clean water and air, but it's heartening to think of the youth group at St. Edward the Confessor Parish in Richmond, Virginia. They sponsored a two-week "fast" from every liquid except tap water and donated the money saved to a project providing clean water in Nicaragua.

As Helen Keller said, "The world is full of suffering, but also of the efforts to alleviate it." Those who repay the thefts which occur in our homes and society brilliantly honor the Seventh Commandment.

***Kathy Coffey, the mother of four, is an editor at Living the Good News in Denver, Colorado. She has won numerous writing awards. Her newest book is The Art of Faith (Twenty-Third Publications, 2007).***

#### **Questions for Reflection:**

- Kathy Coffey mentions ways to reflect more deeply on what is meant by stealing. How is this appropriate to your own situation?
- What can you do to make amends for the many ways society dishonors the Seventh Commandment?

### **FAMILY CORNER**

#### **Honesty: Caught, Not Taught**

*By Judith Dunlap*

I was just a novice teacher when one of my students, Randy, came up to my desk to show me the purchase he had made. He was very proud of the clear plastic ruler he held in his hand. He was even prouder of the deal he had gotten when he purchased it. "It only cost a nickel," he said. I asked him how he had gotten such a bargain, and he told me he'd swapped the price tag from another item in the store. I began to comment on his action when he stopped me, saying, "No, really, Mrs. Dunlap, it's O.K. My dad does it all the time." I didn't know what to say.

Now when I look back on that day, I'm actually glad I said nothing to the youngster. Let's be honest. For most young boys, Dad is the equivalent of all-righteous authority. But if the same thing happened at this time in my life, I would make it a point to have a few words with the dad.

I have spent over 25 years talking to parents, catechists and catechetical leaders about how faith is handed on to children. Often, I spend time talking about how we can help youngsters develop a right conscience. It is no surprise that the number one component in raising faith-filled children with an



accurate sense of right and wrong is their parents. What we say in religion class, especially in a child's early years, is always measured by the youngster's own lived experience.

Children today see everything and hear even more. You can't fool them. If you want them to be faith-filled, you need to work on growing in your own faith. If you want them to have an accurate sense of right and wrong, make sure your own compass is always fixed on what is right. It is as simple—and demanding—as that.

**For Family Response:**

As a family, look at a favorite movie or TV show. Watch for the moments when the characters lie and when they are truthful. Discuss the consequences of such choices in the story line—and in real life.

## Why Truth Is Sacred (Eighth Commandment)

By Kathy Coffey

"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" (Exodus 20:16).

Aunt Martha sports a hideous new dress that accentuates her bulges. In the words of the children's book, "What do you say, dear?"

Perhaps you cop out: "Fuchsia is certainly your color!" or "So good to see you again!" Maybe you describe the hidden, unseen reality: "You're so cheerful!" But in this case the truth, "That's the ugliest dress I've ever seen," is cruel. Even the most honest person wouldn't insult her aunt.

What then, as Pontius Pilate asked, is truth?

The example may oversimplify the complex situations in which we find ourselves today. We've recently seen deception by people we have placed our trust in. Countries go to war based on wobbly, some would say concocted, intelligence. Priests with a history of child abuse have been placed in parishes without sufficient concern for the need to protect possible new victims.

But we can't point our finger at others until we turn it on ourselves. As children we may have figured out that small lies were O.K., as long as we didn't get caught. As adolescents we learned to protect a fragile ego by broadcasting the positives and concealing the negatives about ourselves. As adults we struggle to maintain a balance between privacy and intimacy. We don't want to "tell all" as on a talk show. But we also know that those we love deserve the full truth about ourselves, even when it's painful to reveal.

### Truth Is Sacred

Let's look at two examples. Brendan is the life of the party, an Irish storyteller. No one minds when he exaggerates; it makes the stories better. Unfortunately, that strategy carries into his personal life. His ideas about himself grow grandiose and far from reality, but, sadly, he believes them. Brendan gets caught up in the fiction. He always stars in the latest exploit. But by now, no one is sure if it really happened.

Molly, on the other hand, gives flesh to the saying, "She knows who she is." People needing an honest opinion count on her to give it. She trusts them with the truth because she believes they can handle it. She openly admits that she's done her time in therapy. Without boring people too much, she'll explain

that alcohol is poison for her system. She knows her dark side as well as her assets, and conveys a hard-won authenticity.

So this business of truth-telling gets more complex than Aunt Martha's dress. The biblical origins of our tradition show why truth is revered as sacred.

St. John's prologue begins, "In the beginning was the Word," full of light and truth. From that fullness "we have all received, grace in place of grace" (1:1, 16). The reality that underlies our lives is an outpouring of divine abundance. To distort the truth does a disservice to God who is constantly creating, enlarging, deepening and beautifying us. To shore up our puny egos with falsehoods denies that amazing gift. Unfortunately, some of us rely on our weakness as an easy excuse, rather than celebrating God's strength and energy in us.

### Jesus, Our Model

The perfect example of inner solidity comes from Jesus. When the soldiers approach him in the Garden of Olives, he doesn't hide. In fact, he initiates the conversation: "Whom are you looking for?" When they answer "Jesus of Nazareth," he says simply, "I am he" (John 18:4-5). What if Jesus had fudged? Suspecting what lay ahead, he could have said, "Oh, no, you've got the wrong guy. I just look like him." Or "Not I—try that fellow behind the tree." He might have escaped. Instead, he stands in his truth, despite what that will cost.

What does Jesus model for us?

When, like Brendan, we create myths about ourselves to impress others, we deny what is far more wonderful about us: our likeness to God. When we perpetuate the falsehoods of advertising, we prefer appearance to reality. When we tolerate bad art or phoniness, we refuse God the praise that even a blade of grass or an honest dandelion can give.

Thomas Merton says that our response to God's initial Word is to become God's words: God's answer and echo. To do that, we must hone our words to the most deliberate, accurate ones we can find. Thus, we honor the Eighth Commandment.

#### Questions for Reflection:

- Kathy Coffey speaks of relying on our weakness as an easy excuse, rather than celebrating God's strength and energy. Name the strengths and energy you see in yourself and others in your group.
- In what situations do you find it difficult to be truthful? In what ways does society encourage or discourage truthful behavior?

### FAMILY CORNER

#### Teaching the Truth to Children

By Jeanne Hunt

*The dog ate my homework. The check is in the mail.* These are little white lies that can make getting out of a predicament a little easier. But eventually the truth will catch up with us. Choosing to be honest and keeping the truth as a practice take awareness and forethought. Almost 25 years ago, Dr. M. Scott Peck wrote a book about human evil—*People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil*—that still speaks to our times. Peck chose the title because, he said, "Lying is both a cause and a manifestation of evil."

Every time we believe a lie, he said, our goodness is diminished. It is the work of parents to raise children who know and love the truth. So, how can we promote the truth in our homes?

First, model truth in word and action. We must do what we teach, or we are teaching something else. The phone rings and I say to my children, "If it is a telemarketer, tell him I'm not home" rather than "Tell him I am not interested in speaking to him." When speeding down the highway I slow down when I see a police car. The message my children learn is that you can speed as long as you don't get caught.

Second, do not pad the truth to protect your child. As painful as an honest opinion may be, it helps your child see reality. Looking in the mirror and facing what needs to change or accepting what cannot be changed are valuable life lessons. Learning the gentle skill of revealing the truth to children without diminishing their self-esteem can help clarify their real gifts.

Third, reward the truth. When a family member chooses to act and speak truthfully, acknowledge the merit of that choice, especially when it brings difficulty or painful repercussions.

**For Family Response:**

As a family, make a list of people who are hallmarks of truthfulness. Discuss each person on your "truth list" and post it on the refrigerator as an ongoing call to honesty.

## Living In Gratitude (Ninth Commandment)

By Kathy Coffey

"You shall not covet your neighbor's wife" (Exodus 20:17).

In Stephen Sondheim's musical *Into the Woods*, a riff on classical fairy tales, two brothers sing a duet called "Agony." In Act One, they spill forth their unfulfilled longing—one brother for Cinderella, the other for Rapunzel.

The former has searched all night for the elusive maiden who fled his dance at midnight. The latter is intrigued by the unattainable woman confined to a tower with no doors. In standard folktale style, the obstacles are resolved, the slipper fits, the golden hair provides access to the tower. Both men marry their beloved.

By Act Two, reality sneaks in. The novelty has worn off, and the brothers once again sing "Agony." This time, they pour out their desire for a maiden with creamy skin and black hair, who sleeps perpetually in a glass coffin, guarded by a stern dwarf. Snow White, because she is unattainable, has become the object of their affections.

The shift not only creates amusing comedy. It also points to a strange, stubborn trait of human nature: We want what we can't have. This quirk is addressed by both the Ninth and the Tenth Commandments.

These two commandments may puzzle us North Americans today at several levels. Wasn't it the itch for something more that explored and settled our frontiers, built the transcontinental railroad, discovered penicillin and designed the computer? Don't our longings for finer homes, education and health care provide a better world for the next generation? And for those aware of gender roles, isn't a prohibition against coveting the neighbor's *wife* an archaic attempt to protect male property rights?

## Rooted in Judaism

If we set the commandments in the context of ancient Jewish culture and values, they make more sense. When the tablets were given to Moses, the people were wandering, vulnerable, without land. How would they maintain their identity? Surrounded by larger, more powerful states, the last thing the Hebrews needed was internal division. Lust and greed would create fissures in a community that needed to stay united for their survival.

Commentators have pointed out a unique feature in this community: the ability to be self-critical. In the Hebrew Scriptures, the prophets warn the people that unchecked desire takes a terrible toll on the poor. While the sacred texts of other cultures glorify kings and priests, the Old Testament criticizes both government and church leadership. In the same vein, the commandment encourages individuals to examine their own wants and say no to those that are inappropriate.

Such a stance is helpful to us because it encourages appreciating the family we have rather than restlessly seeking someone better. A comfortable cup of coffee on the porch with the spouse may in the long run satisfy more than unrealized longing for Antonio Banderas or Reese Witherspoon. The balding guy who forgives his wife's imperfections may act from a long history and a deep kindness. The long-familiar wife has developed a tolerance for hubby's oddities.

The adage says, "Don't worry about what you don't get; worry about what you do get." Gratitude for the riches we have—this spouse, this child, this home, this job, these friends, even these challenges—is the right response to the God who gave them. Without grateful hearts, we look sadly like the cartoon kids surrounded by Christmas gifts, whining for more.

## Admiring the Virtues

No matter what we think we lack, we can choose to focus on what we have. Though I may have a broken arm, the rest of me functions fine. In the context of the Ninth Commandment, we may not have the perfect spouse or "significant other." But instead of focusing on the flaws, we can admire the virtues.

This doesn't rule out having serious conversation about genuine failings, working at honest communication or making efforts to improve. But most people change for the better only in a positive atmosphere that invites growth.

In some ways, Christians today are as vulnerable as that small group of Jews that coalesced around their commandments. The larger, more powerful culture surrounding us sneers contemptuously at our values. We, like the ancient Hebrews, find strength when we're united in gratitude—not comparing ourselves to others or endlessly wishing for someone better.

### Questions for Reflection:

- What advice would you offer to a newly married man and woman to encourage them in their relationship?
- What does it mean to you to be faithful? How does this affect your family life?

**FAMILY CORNER**  
**Love That Endures**  
By Jeanne Hunt

A psychologist once remarked that the average married couple has one wedding and seven marriages. At least seven times in the history of a marriage the partners commit, with the grace of God, to begin a new chapter in their relationship. Marriage is not meant to be stagnant. The relationship is always moving into deeper union or separation. That movement causes couples to reevaluate where they are together.

"Irreconcilable differences" is a term the civil law gives to a broken union. You will hear couples speak about feeling like strangers: *He spent all his time at work. She was no longer physically attracted to me.* These are symptoms of a deeper problem. Falling in love is a wonderful beginning, but it cannot be sustained through years of ups and downs. Married love grows from that initial sexual and physical high. It is a second love that is rooted in God's love and offers a steadfast devotion that endures the decades.

When the union is sacramental, a new dimension is added to the marital journey. The grace allows the couple to yield to God who can lift them from pain, loneliness, and sorrow and offer a new beginning for a failing relationship. The choice is up to the couple: to write a new chapter or to close the book.

At these seven times of crisis, the most common temptation is to look for another partner, for one who is "better" than the one we have. The world teaches us that marriages are disposable, that we can trade in one partner for another, more perfect version. Reason, however, tells us that this is folly and that we are just trading one set of problems for another. To covet another is grounded in selfish desire. Catholic marriage is permanent. The covenant vow brings every grace necessary to endure seven or seventy endings and beginnings.

**For Family Response:**

Observe how TV, magazines, newspapers, etc., present faithfulness and unfaithfulness. Use this awareness as a springboard for discussion with your children.

**How Much Is Enough? (Tenth Commandment)**

By Kathy Coffey

*"You shall not covet your neighbor's goods" (Exodus 20:17).*

"I want a house on a hill like the ones with the gardens where Papa works." In *The House on Mango Street*, Sandra Cisneros remembers her childhood when the Sunday afternoon entertainment was riding around looking at beautiful homes.

But eventually she quits going, not telling her family, "I am ashamed—all of us staring out the window like the hungry. I am tired of looking at what we can't have."

How many of us waste precious time and energy ogling "what we can't have," or figuring out a way to get it? In doing so, we overlook the great goods we do have: the endless reservoir of God's love, the gifts of family and friends, the beauty of creation, a warm pool of memories, individual talents, health, the

support of a faith community. Each of us could create a unique litany of blessings—a far better exercise than longing for the latest iPhone or designer jeans.

We've all had the experience of yearning for something that we thought would bring happiness: the child's bike, the adolescent's car, the adult's antique. Getting the object of our desires might thrill us temporarily, and we might even cherish it for some time. But eventually, the bike gets outgrown, the car dies, and the antique, grown dusty and dull, joins the junk pile. No *thing* can provide the long-term happiness for which we were created.

### 'Good' Longings

Ignatian spirituality encourages our desires—as long as they are consonant with our deepest selves. These longings are good because they are planted in us by God. We should ask, then, for more wisdom, compassion or kindness, because these will make us the fullest, best persons we can be—persons God desires and equips for his service. In contrast, the shopping list of things is simply too small for us, unworthy of God's splendid daughter or son.

If we use the latest gizmos to shore up a weak ego or impress our friends, we're in big trouble, caught in a long quest for *more*. Nothing wrong with the gadget—the problem lies within if we can't believe we're *enough*: fashioned by God, redeemed by Christ, invigorated by the Spirit, intimately loved by the Trinity and precious to some fine human beings. What else do we need?

In *New Seeds of Contemplation*, Thomas Merton eloquently describes how tiring it can become to acquire goods, working endlessly for what fails to satisfy: "Stanch in me the rank wound of covetousness and the hungers that exhaust my nature with their bleeding. Stamp out the serpent envy that stings love with poison and kills all joy."

Most people who accumulate (and this descriptor fits most folks in our society) find that one thing leads to another. New furniture in the living room makes the dining room table look shabby. And on it goes, until we don't even realize we're caught up in an unending cycle. We work hard to afford storage lockers for stuff we don't even use. Then we wonder why we're not at peace. The ecological footprint left by North Americans is gigantic compared to people elsewhere in the world. Even if the loftier reasons to avoid envy don't appeal, this one should: We're destroying the planet's resources with our greed.

### Setting Limits

As the end of life approaches, do we want to cling stubbornly to possessions which probably won't fit into the casket? Or will we be ready to ease joyfully into God's arms because we've been there all along? If we set our ultimate sights on God's face, anything lesser seems like a temporary distraction.

As Joan Chittister writes in *The Ten Commandments*, "Only God is really enough. Only when we see beyond all the things in which we are immersed, only when we learn to hold them all with a relaxed grasp, can we ever discover the One in whom all of them take their being."

#### Questions for Reflection:

- What are some of your deepest longings? How do these desires reflect God's desire for you?
- What do you have more of than you need? How can you reduce the size of your collection and/or share it with others?