

With the Israelites encamped in the Saini wilderness, Moses went up the mountain of God to receive the 10 Commandments. Among them, “Honor your father and your mother, that you may have a long life in the land the LORD your God is giving you” (Ex 20:12).

This commandment is explained and amplified in the Book of Proverbs. “Observe, my son, your father’s command, and do not reject your mother’s teaching. Keep them fastened over your heart always, tie them around your neck. When you lie down they will watch over you, when you wake, they will share your concerns; wherever you turn, they will guide you” (6:19-22). In Deuteronomy, we are also encouraged. “Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD, your God, has commanded you, that you may have a long life and that you may prosper in the land the LORD your God is giving you” (5:16).

Human experience teaches us that fathers and mothers are not perfect, but still there is a command to honor parents. Sirach teaches: “Even if his mind fails, be considerate of him; do not revile him because you are in your prime. Kindness to a father will not be forgotten; it will serve as a sin offering—it will take lasting root. In time of trouble it will be recalled to your advantage, like warmth upon frost it will melt away your sins” (6:13-15).

In John’s Gospel, we see a new and deeper understanding of what it means to honor a father. Jesus speaks of his love for God the Father. “As the Father loves me, so I also love you” (15:9). Imperfect as our human families are, love of an earthly father and mother helps us to begin to understand the love God has for us.

Jesus then speaks of keeping commandments. “If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and remain in his love” (15:10). Jesus honors his Father and shows his love for humanity by offering his life on the cross. Jesus shows a mother and a father how they are to love and respect their children ... caring for them even to the point of death.

Gianna Molla was a pediatrician who gave special attention to mothers, babies, the elderly and poor in her medical practice and in her life. In her second month of pregnancy, she was diagnosed with a fibroma in her uterus. Her first and foremost concern was for the child within her womb. “Conscious of the risk that her continued pregnancy brought, she pleaded with the surgeon to save the life of the child she was carrying, and entrusted herself to prayer and Providence. The life was saved, for which she thanked the Lord. She spent the seven months remaining until the birth of the child in incomparable strength of spirit and unrelenting dedication to her tasks as mother and doctor.” In the words of Jesus from our Gospel today, “I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete. This is my commandment: love one another as I love you” (Jn 15:11-12).

Gianna Molla was able to carry the baby for nine months but knew that the delivery would test her faith. She responded in love willing to lay down her life for the sake of her child. She told the doctors: “If you must decide between me and the child, do not hesitate: choose the child - I insist on it.” Save her.

Gianna Emanuela was born April 21, 1962. A week later her mother carried her own cross to Calvary. “Amid unspeakable pain and after repeated exclamations of ‘Jesus, I love you. Jesus, I love you,’ the mother died.”ⁱ No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for those whom one loves (Jn 15:13).

Honor God the Father as you honor your own father and mother. Honor God the Son as you follow the example of Jesus being obedient and willing to lay down your own life for the ones whom you love.

ⁱ vatican.va/news_services/liturgy/saints/ns_lit_doc_20040516_beretta-molla_en.html