

Seton Hall University

From the Selected Works of Reverend Lawrence E. Frizzell, D.Phil.

December 28, 2008

Love and Responsibility in Family Life

Reverend Lawrence E. Frizzell, D.Phil., *Seton Hall University*



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons CC_BY-NC-ND International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).



Available at: https://works.bepress.com/fatherlawrence_frizzellphil/184/

Love and Responsibility in Family Life

**Reverend Lawrence E. Frizzell
Institute of Judaeo-Christian Studies
Seton Hall University
South Orange, NJ**

This article was previously published in *The Catholic Advocate*.

Holy Family Sunday

Sunday Readings for December 28, 2008 for Cycle B:
Sir 3:2-6, 12-14; Ps 128; Col 3:12-21; Lk 2:22-40

LOVE AND RESPONSIBILITY IN FAMILY LIFE

Lawrence E. Frizzell

Not long ago, national attention was given to a teacher whose letter of resignation described a tragic and not uncommon situation in our society. "In our public schools today, the teachers are afraid of the principals, the principals are afraid of the superintendents, the superintendents are afraid of the children, and the children are afraid of nobody." How can we cope with this anomaly?

How often do parents and educators reflect on the Church's perennial wisdom with regard to family life? The Second Vatican Council offered the distillation of a perspective that needs to be reiterated. "Because parents have given life to their children, on them lies the gravest obligation of educating their family...The role of parents in education is of such importance that it is almost impossible to provide an adequate substitute. It is, therefore, the duty of parents to create a family atmosphere inspired by love and devotion to God and their fellow creatures which will promote an integrated, personal and social education of their children..." (Declaration on Christian Education #3).

The key words in this challenge "to create a family atmosphere" are "love and devotion." A wholesome love, grounded in the total commitment of the spouses to God and to each other, is essential to the vocation of marriage. This implies the partners' respect for each other as created in the divine image and a sense of wonder that they cooperate with God in transmitting the divine image and their own likeness to the unique individuals who are their children. The parents' devotion to God bears a direct relationship to their vocation as educators. This includes a balanced understanding of two realities: their awe before the Creator and the unconditional love that God bestows. Then parents are able to exercise authority benignly and to love in a manner that demands continuing growth into responsibility. Fortunately our society has begun to grapple with the diminishing of personhood through spouse and child abuse. But do parents teach that love is demanding? It is never too early to learn that each person must make many daily contributions to the good of the family and larger component groups of society. A sage named Jesus, son of Sirach, lived in Jerusalem about two centuries before the time of Christ. His long work represents the mature reflections of an educator who was imbued with the Word of God and the wisdom of Israel.

This Sunday's reading constitutes a reflection on the commandment to honor one's parents (Ex 20:12). The duties of parenthood are presupposed; both the commandment and the present text stress the rights of parents, not merely while children share the same roof but throughout their lifetime. Honoring our parents should involve recognition that they first manifested God's image to us and were instrumental in our life of faith. Did they fail in one or another facet of their vocation? Perhaps there is a need for mutual forgiveness as the beginning to a deeper relationship. At the same time, young parents should ask for an insight into their own failings, and for the

strength to correct them.

Luke describes the obedience of Joseph and Mary to divine law as their most fundamental responsibility as Jewish parents. Thus they arranged for Jesus to be circumcised on the eighth day (Lk 2:21; Lv 12:3). The second step was for them to fulfill the commandment to consecrate every firstborn male to the Lord (Ex 13:12-13). Normally the child would be redeemed by the gift of silver to a Levite, recalling that the priestly service on behalf of all Israel is their privilege. Why was Luke silent about this symbolic act of redemption? Perhaps he wished to indicate that the heavenly Father accepted the sacrifice of his Son (see Lk 2:46-49).