

RESPECT

How often do we hear the complaint that there isn't any respect any more? We look upon our world with a sense of loss that what once existed is no longer there. Yet, if we were to ask others to define respect, answers would differ greatly. For many, it would be defined in terms of how we personally are or are not being treated.

The German word for respect is *Ehrfrucht*, which is a combination of two concepts: honor and fear. Perhaps reflecting on this definition of respect is what is most needed in our world, our homes and our hearts. *Honor* here is described as the feeling of being in the presence of greatness, and *fear* as a profound sense of awe that acknowledges we can never fully know another person, and therefore one which asks us to create a reverential space for another.

“Stand together yet not too near together, for the pillars of the temple stand apart, and the oak trees and the cypress grow not in each other's shadow.” Kahlil Gibran

Honor and fear are also used to describe our approach to the Divine. We speak of having awe or fear of the Lord - of knowing that God is much more than we can ever comprehend or experience. And hopefully, when we encounter God in prayer, in nature, in ourselves, or in others, we honor the presence of greatness, and develop a divine humility in bowing before that greatness in profound respect. If this definition of respect was present in our lives, how different our world would be! Imagine truly seeing yourself as a temple of the Holy Spirit, seeing those around you as made in the image of God, seeing the earth as the Lord's home.

“Most relational breakups are the result of one person losing awe for the other, or taking the other for granted and not allowing the proper reverential space.”

“Self-respect cannot be bought. It is never for sale. It comes to us when we are alone in quiet moments and in quiet places, when we suddenly realize that, knowing the good, we have done it; knowing the beautiful, we have served it; knowing the truth, we have spoken it.”

For the next month we invite you to focus on respect - to pray for the virtue for yourself, to thank God for the gift where it already appears, and to think of those persons you know who are examples of this virtue. Once you have identified these people, find a way to tell them that you see the virtue of respect in their lives. A few examples might be:

- Persons who have a sense of the sacredness of all life.
- Those who are open to the wisdom of other faith traditions, or to increasing their understanding of God or religion.
- Parents who provide a healthy example of respect in their homes.
- Someone who does not stereotype others, but allows others to define themselves.
- Those who practice the little courtesies of opening doors for others, allowing someone ahead of them in line, letting someone else be the center of conversation.

Prayer for the virtue of respect:

Loving God, thank you for giving me the gift of your Son who has shown me the path to you. As I strive to follow his example, I ask for the virtue of respect. Open my heart to your voice calling me to a greater awareness of and sensitivity to others. Help me to look upon them with a sense of awe and the acknowledgement that they are your presence in our world. May I see myself as the temple of your Holy Spirit and strive to make my life sacred. Remove from me any desire to own or manipulate others. Create in me a strong sense of wonder at all that you have made and teach me to approach you and your world with a deep reverence. Filled with respect for all that exists, may I model that respect to others. Amen.