

This week my father took my five-year old nephew Jonathan on an errand. Jonathan's oldest brother Jeff is planning a ski trip soon. It's that time of year. College students take their ski trips in winter so the casts will be off before graduation. Riding the passenger seat of dad's car as if he were the driver, Jonathan asked his grandfather if he'd ever gone skiing when he was younger. Dad said no, he'd never skied in his life. Jonathan, obviously hoping for a better response than that, said, "Maybe you did, but you forgot." Dad grew up in New Orleans. So he explained to Jonathan that where he lived as a boy, it snowed so rarely that if he had skied, he'd surely remember. But Jonathan stood his ground, and said, "You could have forgot. Sometimes old people forget."

On Holy Family Sunday each year we hear a passage about family life from the Old Testament Book of Sirach. It urges us to honor father and mother. Specifically, it says, "My child, help your father in his old age, and do not grieve him as long as he lives; even if his mind fails, be patient with him; because you have all your faculties do not despise him. For kindness to a father will not be forgotten, and will be credited to you against your sins." We can only guess what Sirach's family life was like. Perhaps he grew up greatly respecting his father, but suffered the pain of watching a lively figure deteriorate. Growing old is hard on the elderly, but it's also hard on their children. Sirach suggests patience and a continuation of respect for parents.

Relating to parents presents hard work for children of every age. Kids feel guilty when they disobey parents. Grown up they feel guilty when they still can't get along with them. It's hard to give blanket advice on parent relationships. Certainly the ideal is to preserve respect and love. But some parents have abused their children and simply must be deprived of them. Some children have abused their parents, and the hurts run so deep you wonder if they can ever be healed. I think the key word here is "respect" because it can take so many different forms. If families strive for respect, I think they'll be OK.