

## Thinking More Deeply about the 10 Commandments

Tomorrow night, we'll be celebrating our parish penance service. Hopefully you can join us; we'll have a number of priests here to hear individual confessions.

Coincidentally this week's first reading is the giving to the Israelites of the 10 commandments from God. Many of us memorize them in faith formation class, but as with anything there's some deeper meaning behind the words. So how can we really think about them and follow them? Following are some ideas that can be useful as we examine our conscience.

The first commandment is I am the Lord your God, and you shall not have other God's before me. We might think well of course I believe in God, so I'll check that off. But look deeper. What do you worship? Is it your money, your pride, your ego? Is all of your time spent at the office, or in youth sports, or just being a busy body? Other people worship the gods of money, sensualism, power, or position. Other times we ignore moral teachings of the Church we don't like, placing ourselves ahead of God by picking and choosing what commandments of God are right or wrong based on our own opinion.

The second commandment is you shall not take the name of your Lord in vain. It might seem that this is related to profanity; but there's more to it than that. Profanity is typically a venial sin, as it lacks sufficient reflection to commit and sometimes words just slip out. But with this, we should also think about how we talk - or don't talk - about God in our daily life. Sometimes we can speak about the Faith, the Church, or the sacred with irreverence or defiance. Other times we can become casual in our speech about God, and disrespect Him. We can also violate this commandment when we are demeaning and disrespectful of others as they are created in God's image. Are we a coward and afraid to talk about our faith, or do we willingly confront "cancel culture" and speak out about the truth of what we believe?

The third is to remember to keep holy the Sabbath day. It goes without saying there are some who go Mass once or twice a year that are much more holy than some who go every week. Keeping holy the Sabbath is not about just showing up for Mass. Much like a person who wants to become an expert at something has to practice again and again, the same is true with our faith. It is OK to work on a Sunday; many people have to. It's OK to enjoy the day with family, or to play sports. But where we lose sight of this commandment is when we take God off the front burner. When we become lax in our prayer life. When we become dismissive of not coming to Mass on a Sunday because we are too busy, and say "I'll go next week," because this also sets a bad example for others in the family (and I also point out to anyone who is a child they do not violate this commandment as they don't have the ability to drive to Mass). The danger is that God can become in our lives the same thing as homework, meetings, sports, etc. That's not an option. God is meant to inform all that we do, and when we grow in our knowledge of Him, and welcome Him into our hearts, it will inform everything we do. (And also do know that the suspension for the obligation of Sunday Mass attendance in our diocese, now in effect for a year, is still in effect as we hopefully journey towards more normal days ahead).

The next series of commandments are on the second tablet, as they have to do with our relationships with one another.

Fourth is honor your father and mother. If we are still at home and under our parents care, have we listened to our parents, even if it's things we don't want to hear? And that also applies to our teachers in school. For parents, it also applies to you - you honor your children by giving them proper food, clothing, shelter, and caring for their deeper needs by being involved and active in their lives. Parents also live this commandment by passing on the faith to their young, and set a good example for them. As we age, we also honor our parents by praying for them, and trying to be active in their lives and giving them respect, which parents also give to their adult children.

Fifth, we are told not to kill. We might think this is one easy to skip over, but not so fast. Certainly, taking an innocent human life is morally reprehensible, but how do we stand up for the unborn as well? Do we verbally or emotionally abuse others? Do we destroy others reputations through gossip or use of social media? Do we seek revenge? Have you driven recklessly under the influence of drugs or alcohol, or abused them? Very few people kill in the common understanding of the term, but sometimes we can cause harm to others or ourselves through our decisions or refusal to act.

Sixth, you shall not commit adultery. It's related to the ninth commandment, you shall not covet your neighbor's wife. The tragedy of adultery is that it's a violation of trust between spouses. Couples disagree on finances, child rearing, jobs, but a violation of trust cuts to the heart of marriage. This also of course doesn't just apply to marriage. When one gives into sensualism, looking at inappropriate images of the body on a computer and willfully entertain thoughts (which are normal to have, but we don't want to engage them through pornography). Our theology of the body is that it is a gift from God; and the marriage act between a husband and wife is also sacred. Sadly, so often in society the message can be that our bodies and souls are separate, and the body can become objectified, or a young person feels they have to look a certain way to be accepted. This commandment reminds us that we are always body and soul, and we can never separate the two.

The seventh and tenth commandments are also related, not stealing and coveting our neighbors goods. We need to respect other's property. Private property is a right; and whether it's something small or something larger, it deserves respect. We also want to avoid envy of other's goods, because we are blessed and have been given so much. That means we should share what we have been given with those who have need, and try to avoid a consumerist mentality where we become obsessed with having more and more things as this causes us to lose sight of the needs of others.

We are told in the ninth commandment not to bear false witness against our neighbor. Saint Thomas Aquinas said that gossip is actually stealing, as it steals the reputation of another and so violates the seventh commandment. But so too does it violate the 8th. This commandment includes lying as well, which causes distrust between people. On the one hand we are entitled to privacy so don't have to answer every question we are asked, but when we lie it causes mistrust and often the truth comes out anyway. When we gossip or slander, use nasty words and backstabbing observations, it causes separation in the body, so we should ask ourselves always, "would I speak to Jesus in this manner" before we open our mouths. This also includes thinking carefully about what we post on social media.

Lastly looking at the eighth commandment, we are told not to steal. Most of us don't go in and hold up a bank, but we can take advantage of others. Sometimes we steal time, expecting others to do things for us. Sometimes we borrow money and never repay it. Or maybe we steal things from a workplace. Some cheat on taxes; or are slothful on how they do their work or cheat others. It can also include wasting time or resources that belong to others.

All of these are summarized by Jesus who tells us to love God with our whole heart, mind and soul and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Through it all, though we will fall, God's love is always there for us. Taking that to heart, while God forgives, we also strive to respond to that love by growing in our response to it. So make a regular act of contrition and celebrate confession, and think about the commandments as a regular part of your spirituality. God's law is not there to constrain us, but to help us reach our potential - so let's strive to follow it not just in Lent, but every day of our lives.

God bless,

Fr. Paul