

THE GREAT COMMANDMENTS AND THE FIRST THREE COMMANDMENTS

BACKGROUND READING

God does not want us to get lost on our journey to Heaven. So He gave us the Ten Commandments as a map that shows us the way. Moses, when he gives the Israelites the Ten Commandments, describes them as the path of life that leads us to walk in God's way: "I have today set before you life and good, death and evil. If you obey the commandments of the LORD, your God, which I am giving you today, loving the LORD, your God, and walking in his ways, and keeping his commandments, statutes and ordinances, you will live and grow numerous" (Deuteronomy 30:15-16). We should see the Ten Commandments in light of God's liberation of the people of Israel from the bondage of slavery in Egypt. At the beginning of the listing of the Ten Commandments, God begins His commands with these words; "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Exodus 20:2). In the same way, we are meant to see the Ten Commandments in the light of God liberating us today from the bondage of sin.

Freedom to Love

Not only does God want us not to get lost on our journey toward Him, He also wants to reveal Himself to us. When God called Moses up the mountain to give him the Ten Commandments, God appeared to him "face to face...from the midst of the fire" (Deuteronomy 5:4). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says, "The gift of the Ten Commandments is the gift of God himself and his holy will. In making his will known, God reveals himself to his people" (CCC 2059). God wants to be a personal God to all of us. He wants us to know who He is and how we can live our life in Him. We can see in the Exodus story how God freed His people and showed them the path of life. God loved His people before they even knew Him, and then called them to Himself.

This truth of the love of God for all human persons, and the redemption that He won for them and for us, is made clear and full in the revelation of Jesus Christ. Jesus came and confirmed the binding truth of the Ten Commandments for all of our lives.

He summarized the entire law of the Old Testament in the Two Great Commandments: “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments” (Matthew 22:37-40). Here we see that the Ten Commandments are not just a set of rules or restrictions. Instead, they are meant to free us to act in a positive way to love God and love our neighbor. The first three commandments teach us to love God, and the seven following teach us to love our neighbor. When we keep the first three commandments, we are giving God the love and reverence that He is due because He is God. When we break the first three commandments, we are choosing to love ourselves and other things more than we love God, who made us and gave us these things.

The First Commandment

The traditional wording for the First Commandments is: “I am the Lord your God: you shall not have strange gods before me.” Obeying the First Commandment means adoring and worshipping God alone. We cannot place anything in our lives before Him, not our material wealth, ambition, or even our relationships with others. Because God is the source of everything we have and love, to place anything before Him also distorts our relationship with other people and things. We can keep the First Commandments through constant acts of faith, hope, and love; praying to God; and keeping our promises to Him.

Here are some sins that go specifically against the First Commandment:

- **Idolatry:** Worshipping someone else or something other than God.
- **Divination and Magic:** Putting our faith and trust in spiritual powers that do not belong to God. This includes putting faith in fortune-tellers or others who claim to have special magical powers.
- **Tempting God:** Putting God’s goodness and almighty power to the test.
- **Sacrilege:** The act of treating holy objects with disrespect.
- **Simony:** Buying or selling the things God offers.
- **Atheism:** Refusing to believe in God.

The Second Commandment

The traditional wording for the Second Commandment is: “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.” The Second Commandment teaches us that we love God by always using His name and the names of His saints with love. The Second Commandment teaches us not to use God’s name in an improper way. It also forbids us from using the Virgin Mary’s name or the names of the saints in a way meant to insult them.

Here are some sins that go specifically against the Second Commandment:

- **Blasphemy:** Speech, thought, or action that shows disrespect to God, the Church, or persons dedicated to God.
- **Perjury:** Lying under oath. If we take an oath to tell the truth but then we lie, we are telling God that we want Him to lie for us. God is always true

to His promises and never lies! For this reason, false oaths and perjury seriously offend God.

The Third Commandment

The traditional wording for the Third Commandment is: “Remember to keep holy the Lord’s Day.” The Third Commandment teaches us to keep the Lord’s Day holy. We do this most of all by going to Holy Mass. We also spend time with family and friends and avoid unnecessary work. The ancient Jews observed the Sabbath, which marked the completion

of God’s creation of the world. As Christians, we celebrate the Lord’s Day on Sunday, the “eighth day” on which Jesus rose from the dead. This is why we call it the Lord’s Day. It reminds us of His Resurrection, and how He created the whole world new!

The first three commandments are a set of laws that give us definite, concrete guidance on how to act in our relationship with God. But all the commandments are intertwined. For example, you cannot love God without loving His children – our fellow human beings. The next seven commandments act as signposts to guide our treatment of our neighbor.

LESSON 6

WORDS TO KNOW

The Words to Know are words that you and your children should know and understand at the end of this month. Use your best judgment about which words to expect each of your children to learn. For older children, you may want to have them create flash cards to help them remember what they have learned.

Decalogue Another name for the Ten Commandments. From the Greek for “ten words.”

Ten Commandments The ten commands God gave to His Chosen People. They were written by God to be an objective moral standard for His people, an expression of the divine law of God.

Two Great Commandments Jesus’ teaching that “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind,” and “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” These two commandments are a summary of all Ten Commandments.

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT AND THE DOMESTIC CHURCH

BACKGROUND READING

Jesus summarized the entire law of the Old Testament with the two Great Commandments, “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments” (Matthew 22:37-40). We have already examined the First Great Commandment, which shows us what is required for us to have a relationship with our loving God in the first three commandments. The Second Great Commandment, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” helps us to know how we are to treat one another, and what is forbidden in our dealings with other persons. The last seven commandments outline for us how we are to live out the command to love others as ourselves. We will now be examining the Fourth Commandment.

The Fourth Commandment

The traditional wording for the Fourth Commandment is: “Honor your father and

your mother.” In the book of Exodus the command is written this way: “Honor your father and your mother, that you may have a long life in the land the LORD your God is giving you” (Exodus 20:12).

This commandment explicitly requires children to honor their mother and father, as this is the most basic and universal of all relationships. But the boundaries of the Fourth Commandment go far beyond these basic family relationships. The Fourth Commandment requires our “honor, affection, and gratitude toward elders and ancestors” (CCC 2199). It also outlines for us our duty to honor and respect all those who have authority over us: “We are obliged to honor and respect all those whom God, for our good, has vested with his authority” (CCC 2197).

The Fourth Commandment safeguards God’s beautiful plan for the family, and helps us to understand the relationship that God intended between the family and society. It is in the light of understanding God’s plan for the family, that this commandment outlines the duties of both children and of parents in

the human family, and the duties of all persons in the society in which we live.

The first and obvious requirement of the Fourth Commandment is the duty of children to love and honor their father and mother. The placement of this command, directly following our duties to God, reveals to us its great importance in how we are to prioritize our love. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says, “God has willed that, after him, we should honor our parents to whom we owe life and who have handed on to us the knowledge of God” (CCC 2197).

The Fourth Commandment is the first commandment to carry with it a promise of blessing in its second part: “that you may have a long life in the land the LORD your God is giving you.” If we obey its command then we shall enjoy the spiritual and temporal fruits that are promised with it. On the other hand, if we fail to obey God’s command to honor our parents, then “great harm to communities and to individuals” occur (CCC 2200).

The Human Family in The Plan of God

In the beginning, when God created man and woman, He instituted the human family and commanded that the first man and woman go forth and multiply (cf. Genesis 1:28). The human family, therefore, is a divine institution, and must be recognized by all public authorities as such. The *Catechism* defines a family as “a man and a woman united in marriage, together with their children” (CCC 2202). This understanding of family “should be considered the normal reference point by which the different forms of family relationship are to be evaluated” (CCC 2202). The purpose of the family is for the good of the

spouses, and the procreation and education of the children. In the creation of the human family God also gifted it with fundamental rights, responsibilities, and duties for its common good and the good of all of society.

Children will form their first understanding of what love is – and therefore who God is – through the love of their parents. Through constant, faithful, unconditional love and a warm and caring environment, they will know, even instinctively, that God loves and cares for them. Parents also have the responsibility and the great privilege of evangelizing their children. From the earliest years parents should introduce their children to the great mysteries of their faith, and the life of the Church. Parents are the “first heralds” of the Good News for their family, and the *Catechism* points out that “a wholesome family life can foster interior dispositions that are a genuine preparation for a living faith and remain a support for it throughout one’s life” (CCC 2225).

As a community of persons united in faith, and reflecting the creative work of God Our Father, the Christian family rightly is called the “domestic church” (*Lumen Gentium* 11). Another way of expressing this truth is to call the family the church of the home. This title speaks of the great dignity with which Christ crowned the Christian family. This family is to be a domestic church where faith, hope, and love abide, and where each member is called to continue the work of Jesus by sharing the “Good News” of salvation with others. Sometimes this proclamation of the Gospel is with our words, but most often it is with the way in which our family lives out our life of faith. It is in the family where we first begin our journey of Life in Christ.

LESSON 7

WORDS TO KNOW

The Words to Know are words that you and your children should know and understand at the end of this month. Use your best judgment about which words to expect each of your children to learn. For older children, you may want to have them create flash cards to help them remember what they have learned.

Blessing A prayer asking for God's power and care upon someone or something. God is the source of all blessing.

Domestic Church The Christian family. The family is the first place where children learn about God's love for them, and how to love others. The word domestic means "of the home."