

CHAPTER 2

Jesus Christ and the First Three Commandments

LESSON 2

The First, Second, and Third Commandments of God

The First Commandment

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me.

This commandment is concerned chiefly with the worship and adoration God deserves. As the verse where we first find the first commandment makes clear, God is most deserving of our whole hearted worship, for he has brought us “out of the house of slavery” (Ex. 20:2). This commandment means that we must show our love for God in the highest possible way. In our everyday life we honor people who are outstanding because they have done great things. We look upon Washington and Lincoln as great men and we try to show them the respect and honor we feel they deserve. We love and honor Mother Mary and the saints too. But we never adore or worship them, for only God is worthy of this. He is the Supreme Being, Creator of heaven and earth and all things. He alone merits the worship of adoration and, in adoring Him, we acknowledge that He is the Sovereign Lord, the one to whom we owe all we are and have.



We Worship God by Faith

You can likely think of countless instances where you have shown “faith” in other people. You believe your parents when they answer your questions. You believe your teachers and the books you read in school. You believe your friends when they tell you what they have been doing. If we believe men when they tell us things, then how much more should we believe all that God has revealed? He is God, and there is no question of being deceived, for He can neither deceive nor be deceived. Nevertheless, spiritual faith (a theological virtue that comes by grace) is not the same thing as merely believing something without understanding it or possessing concrete evidence. Faith, or a deeper faith, is something we ought to pray for which gives us a special kind of spiritual “vision”; we cannot increase our faith merely by telling ourselves we should believe something even if we feel no reason to believe it.

Do you recall how the centurion came to Jesus and asked Him to cure his servant? The centurion’s faith in Christ’s power was so firm that our Lord healed his servant and praised his faith publicly: “Amen, I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith” (Lk. 7:9).

God alone merits the worship of adoration. Like the centurion in the Gospel, we offer this worship through faith.



In every Mass the priest uses the words of the centurion in making his great act of faith. What are they?

Again, our faith in God is not something purely natural; in Baptism we received the supernatural virtue of faith, a gift from God. *Faith obliges us: to make efforts to find out what God has revealed; to believe firmly what God has revealed; and to profess our faith openly whenever necessary.*

A Catholic can best safeguard his faith by making frequent acts of faith, by praying for a strong faith, by studying his religion very earnestly, by living a good life, by good reading, by refusing to associate with the enemies of the Church, and by not reading books and papers opposed to the Church and her teaching.

Our faith can become weak through lack of exercise; it can be lost by neglecting it or by sinning against it. *A Catholic sins against faith by apostasy, heresy, and indifferentism.*

We Worship God by Hope

Hope obliges us to trust firmly that God will give us eternal life and the means to obtain it.

We sin against hope by presumption and despair. *A person sins by presumption when he trusts that he can be saved by his own efforts without God's help, or by God's help without his own efforts.* An attitude of presumption sounds like the following: "Well, God is good and merciful and even if I have not led a good life, I can go right on doing as I please and when I come to die, I am sure that God will give me a last-minute chance to repent." Or, "Oh, I am doing all right; I do not need God's help. I can manage pretty well by myself."

Another abuse of this gift of hope is to be found in the tragic story of Judas. In what way did he sin against hope? His case is one of despair. *A person sins by despair when he deliberately refuses to trust that God will give him the necessary help to save his soul.* There is never a valid reason to despair in this way, precisely because Christ has overcome sin for us and has the power

to save even those who are most far from God. Paul testified to God's perfect ability to save us when he said, "I can do all things through him [Christ] who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13).

How can one commit the sin of sacrilege? *A person sins by sacrilege when he mistreats sacred persons, places, or things.* For instance, an example of sacrilege would be to intentionally use an icon or crucifix as a doorstep.

We Worship God by Charity

Completing the group of virtues relating to the first commandment is charity. *Charity, also known as Christian love, obliges us to love God above all things because He is infinitely good, and to love our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God.* There is no better way to understand what this love looks like, and indeed to begin to attain it, than to look upon and imitate the life of Christ; Christ's love for the Father, and for us, is perfect.

The saints also teach us the love of God. We can honor the saints *first, by imitating their holy lives; second, by praying to them; third, by showing respect to their relics and images.*

Let us pray that God may daily increase in our hearts the virtues of faith, hope, and charity. These virtues will enable us to live in a manner most pleasing to God, and will insure our happiness for all eternity.

“So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.”

—1 John 4:17

The Second Commandment

Thou shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

The second commandment, like the first, has to do with man's relation toward his Creator. *By the second commandment we are commanded always to speak with reverence of God, of the saints, and of holy things, and to be truthful in taking oaths and faithful to them and to our vows.* For the Jews of the Old Testament, God's name was considered so holy that they refrained from using it even

in prayer. They used a substitute for it. Did the coming of Christ make any difference in the way God's name was used? When Christ taught the Apostles the Our Father, how did He bring in the idea of reverence for God's name?

Consider this story.

A young man was lying in a hospital. The doctors and nurses were gathered around him. The chief surgeon spoke, "My young friend, I think that I should tell you frankly that your malady has been diagnosed as cancer of the tongue. In order to save your life it will be necessary to remove your tongue. We must operate at once. Is there anything you wish to say? Do so now as you will be speechless the rest of your life."

The young man grew pale and trembled with fright for a moment. Then he looked into the faces of those around him and said in a calm, earnest voice, "I



want my last words to be: Praised be the sacred name of Jesus.” Wouldn’t you consider this an example of one who had tremendous love and reverence for the Holy Name? This commandment obliges us to show reverence whenever we use the Holy Name, or speak of the saints or holy things. It includes also the taking of only lawful oaths. *An oath is the calling on God to witness to the truth of what we say.* Do you know what things are necessary to make an oath lawful? *To make an oath lawful, three things are necessary: first, we must have a good reason for taking an oath; second, we must be convinced that what we say under oath is true; third, we must not swear, that is, take an oath, to do what is wrong.* What sin would a person be guilty of if he were to lie after taking an oath? This is the grievous sin of perjury.

Some years ago a man’s business was completely ruined because of the dishonest handling of funds by his trusted partner. In his anger the injured man took an oath that some day he would get even with his partner. Was this oath pleasing to God? Explain.

The making of a vow is also included under this commandment. Do you remember that *a vow is a deliberate promise made to God by which a person binds himself under pain of sin to do something that is especially pleasing to God?* Ordinarily what group of people take vows?

Perhaps you have heard an individual use the words “hell” and “damn” in moments of anger. Would it be correct to say that the individual was guilty of cursing? What is cursing? How does it differ from using profane language?

Did you ever hear of the atheist, Robert Ingersoll? He traveled about the country giving lectures against God wherever he could get an audience. On one occasion, he took out his watch and challenged God to strike him dead at the end of three minutes. At the end of the allotted time, he showed his utter contempt for any belief in a Supreme Being. How was the second

commandment violated? Sometimes, speaking vainly is more obvious: *blasphemy is insulting language which expresses contempt for God, either directly or through His saints and holy things.*

To conclude our consideration of the second commandment, it is important to point out that the name of a person in a very special way stands for the person himself. The second commandment, then, reminds us of this fact and tells us that by showing respect and reverence for the name of God, the saints, and holy things, we are honoring God Himself and His beloved friends.

The Third Commandment

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

The third commandment requires that a day be devoted to the external worship which we, as creatures, owe to God. The quotation that follows confirms this: “ For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it” (Exod. 20:11).

Every man is obliged to worship God, not only in his heart, but outwardly and publicly. Through all ages men have set aside certain times for public worship. In the Old Law the Jews observed the seventh day as the day set aside for the worship of God. How did Christ observe the law? Why do we worship God on Sunday?

“If we really understood the Mass, we would die of joy.”

—St. Jean Vianney

Keep Holy the Lord’s Day

By the third commandment we are commanded to worship God in a special manner on Sunday, the Lord’s Day. This does not merely mean that we must go to Mass on Sunday, nor does it mean that



What are some ways that we can keep the Lord's Day holy?

on other days God is to be ignored. God is to be worshiped on all days, but a certain day is set aside for special public worship. How then, do we worship God on Sunday? The Church tells us to participate actively in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Sunday Mass is an obligation binding on all Catholics who have reached the age of reason. Is one ever excused from the obligation to attend Mass on Sunday? Yes; for instance, those may be excused who are ill or who must tend to the illness of another. Or, as another example, a bishop may dispense the members of his diocese of the Sunday obligation because of a problem endangering the community (e.g., a virus pandemic). Even if the Sunday obligation is lifted for someone, they remain obliged, if possible, to prayerfully take part in the Liturgy of the Word (the Scripture readings for Mass that day). Members are also encouraged to make a “spiritual act of communion” whenever it is not possible to receive the Eucharist physically. Can you suggest other acts one could perform in devoting this day to the worship of God? Why does the Church command us to keep Sunday as the Lord's Day? *The Church commands us to keep Sunday as the Lord's day, because*

on Sunday Christ rose from the dead, and on Sunday the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles.

Rest From Work On the Sabbath

In addition to obeying the command to worship God on Sunday by attending Mass, we must also refrain from all unnecessary work or activities that hinder the worship owed to God. By resting on the seventh day, we imitate the rhythm of life which God Himself modeled for us in the book of Genesis: “And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation” (Gen. 2:2–3). Not only should we rest on Sunday in order to worship God at Mass, but—in addition to this—we are also encouraged to engage in leisurely activities that are spiritually joyful, to allow ourselves to do good works of mercy and charity, and to do things conducive to the relaxation of mind and body. For instance, many Christians in our busy and noisy modern world find it appropriate to go on a nature walk since it is a peaceful opportunity to admire and rest in God’s creation. Is work forbidden in every case on Sunday? Meeting import-

TERMS TO KNOW

- commandments
- spiritual
- presumption
- superstition
- counsels
- corporal
- apostasy
- heresy
- sacrilege
- scandal
- despair
- indifferentism
- faith
- charity
- images
- perjury
- cursing
- blasphemy
- oath
- vow
- deliberate
- swearing
- covet
- rejection
- idolatry
- apostate

ant needs for the individual or family can validly excuse persons from Sunday rest. That being said, everyone should take care not to make a habit of leaving tasks to be done on Sunday that could have been prudently done on another day. Sometimes, as Christ showed us, laboring on the Sabbath may be required in order to honor God and to love our neighbor: Recall the incident of our Lord's curing the man with the withered hand (Mk. 2:1–6). How did Christ answer those who claimed He broke the Sabbath?

One Sunday morning a farmer and his wife were on their way to attend Mass at their parish church. They saw an accident in which the driver was apparently seriously injured. By stopping to give assistance they would have to miss Mass. Would the farmer and his wife be justified in doing so? Why?

Summary

The first commandment requires us to offer to God alone the supreme worship that is due to Him. We worship God by acts of faith, hope, and charity, and by adoring Him and praying to Him.

Faith obliges us: (1) to make efforts to find out what God has revealed; (2) to believe firmly what God has revealed; (3) to profess our faith openly whenever necessary. A Catholic sins against faith by apostasy, heresy, indifferentism, and by taking part in non-Catholic worship.

Hope obliges us to trust firmly that God will give us eternal life and the means to obtain it. The sins against hope are presumption and despair.

Charity obliges us to love God above all things because He is infinitely good, and to love our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God. The chief sins against charity are hatred of God and of our neighbor, sloth, envy, and scandal.

Besides the sins against faith, hope, and charity, the first commandment also forbids superstition and sacrilege.

The second commandment requires us always to speak with

reverence of God, of the saints, and of holy things. It also commands us to be truthful in our oaths, and faithful to them and to our vows.

The third commandment requires us to worship God in a special manner on Sunday, the Lord's Day. The Church commands us to worship God on Sunday by attending with attentiveness the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. By the third commandment of God we are forbidden to do any unnecessary work on Sunday. Work is allowed on Sunday when the honor of God, our own need, or that of our neighbor requires it.



FOR ME TO REVIEW

Catechism Lesson

315. Q. What is the first commandment?

A. The first commandment is: "I am the Lord thy God: thou shalt not have strange gods before Me."

317. Q. How do we adore God?

A. We adore God by faith, hope, and love, by prayer and sacrifice.

318. Q. How may the first commandment be broken?

A. The first commandment may be broken by giving to a creature the honor which belongs to God alone; by false worship; and by attributing to a creature a perfection which belongs to God alone.

465. Q. What is faith?

A. Faith is a theological virtue by which we firmly believe the truths which God has revealed.

1164. Q. How does a person sin against faith?

A. A person sins against faith: 1st, By not trying to know what God has taught; 2nd, by refusing to believe all that God has taught; 3rd, by neglecting to profess his belief in what God has taught.

466. Q. What is hope?

A. Hope is a theological virtue by which we firmly trust that God will give us eternal life and the means to obtain it.

1182. Q. Which are the sins against hope?

A. The sins against hope are presumption and despair.

1183. Q. What is presumption?

A. Presumption is a rash expectation of salvation without making proper use of the necessary means to obtain it.

1184. Q. How may we be guilty of presumption?

A. We may be guilty of presumption 1) By putting off confession when in a state of mortal sin; 2) by delaying the amendment of our lives and repentance for past sins; 3) by being indifferent about the number of times we yield to any temptation after we have once yielded and broken our resolution to resist it; 4) by thinking we can avoid sin without avoiding its near occasion; 5) by relying too much on ourselves and neglecting to follow the advice of our confessor in regard to the sins we confess.

1185. Q. What is despair?

A. Despair is the loss of hope in God's mercy.

1186. Q. How may we be guilty of despair?

A. We may be guilty of despair by believing that we cannot resist certain temptations, overcome certain sins or amend our lives so as to be pleasing to God.

467. Q. What is Charity?

A. Charity is a theological virtue by which we love God above all things for His own sake, and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God.

1188. Q. How do we sin against the love of God?

A. We sin against the love of God by all sin, but particularly by mortal sin.

472. Q. What mortal sins are opposed to faith?

A. Atheism, which is a denial of all revealed truths, and heresy, which is a denial of some revealed truths, and superstition, which is a misuse of religion, are opposed to faith.

556. Q. Of what sin are persons guilty who put firm belief in religious or other practices that are either forbidden or useless?

A. Persons who put a firm belief in religious or other practices that are forbidden or useless are guilty of the sin of superstition.

1148. Q. How do we offer God false worship?

A. We offer God false worship by rejecting the religion He has instituted and following one pleasing to ourselves, with a form of worship He has never authorized, approved or sanctioned.

1151. Q. Do those who make use of spells and charms, or who believe in dreams, in mediums, spiritists, fortune-tellers, and the like, sin against the first commandment?

A. Those who make use of spells and charms, or who believe in dreams, in mediums, spiritists, fortune-tellers, and the like, sin against the first commandment, because they attribute to creatures perfections which belong to God alone.

600. Q. In what other ways besides the unworthy reception of the sacraments may persons commit sacrilege?

A. Besides the unworthy reception of the sacraments, persons may commit sacrilege by the abuse of a

sacred person, place or thing; for example, by willfully wounding a person consecrated to God; by robbing or destroying a church; by using the sacred vessels of the altar for unlawful purposes, etc.

1189. Q. Does the first commandment forbid the honoring of the saints?

- A. The first commandment does not forbid the honoring of the saints, but rather approves of it; because by honoring the saints, who are the chosen friends of God, we honor God Himself.

1195. Q. What do we mean by praying to the saints?

- A. By praying to the saints we mean the asking of their help and prayers.

1203. Q. How can we best honor the saints, and where shall we learn their virtues?

- A. We can best honor the saints by imitating their virtues, and we shall learn their virtues from the written accounts of their lives. Among the saints we shall find models for every age, condition or state of life.

1204. Q. Does the first commandment forbid us to honor relics?

- A. The first commandment does not forbid us to honor relics, because relics are the bodies of the saints or objects directly connected with them or with our Lord.

1197. Q. How do we know that the saints hear us?

- A. We know that the saints hear us, because they are with God, who makes our prayers known to them.

1198. Q. Why do we believe that the saints will help us?

- A. We believe that the saints will help us because both they and we are members of the same Church, and they love us as their brethren.

1211. Q. Does the first commandment forbid the making of images?

A. The first commandment does forbid the making of images if they are made to be adored as gods, but it does not forbid the making of them to put us in mind of Jesus Christ, His Blessed Mother, and the saints.

1212. Q. How do we show that it is only the worship and not the making of images that is forbidden by the first commandment?

A. We show that it is only the worship and not the making of images that is forbidden by the first commandment, 1) Because no one thinks it sinful to carve statues or make photographs or paintings of relatives or friends; 2) because God Himself commanded the making of images for the temple after He had given the first commandment, and God never contradicts Himself.

1213. Q. Is it right to show respect to the pictures and images of Christ and His saints?

A. It is right to show respect to the pictures and images of Christ and His saints, because they are the representations and memorials of them.

1215. Q. Is it allowed to pray to the crucifix or to the images and relics of the saints?

A. It is not allowed to pray to the crucifix or images and relics of the saints, for they have no life, nor power to help us, nor sense to hear us.

1216. Q. Why do we pray before the crucifix and the images and relics of the saints?

A. We pray before the crucifix and the images and relics of the saints because they enliven our devotion by exciting pious affections and desires, and by reminding us of Christ and of the saints, that we may imitate their virtues.

1217. Q. What is the second commandment?

A. The second commandment is: Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.

1218. Q. What do you mean by taking God's name in vain?

A. By taking God's name in vain I mean taking it without reverence, as in cursing or using in a light and careless manner, as in exclamation.

1219. Q. What are we commanded by the second commandment?

A. We are commanded by the second commandment to speak with reverence of God and of the saints, and of all holy things, and to keep our lawful oaths and vows.

1239. Q. What is forbidden by the second commandment?

A. The second commandment forbids all false, rash, unjust, and unnecessary oaths, blasphemy, cursing, and profane words.

1221. Q. What is an oath?

A. An oath is the calling upon God to witness the truth of what we say.

1231. Q. What is necessary to make an oath lawful?

A. To make an oath lawful it is necessary that what we swear to be true, and that there be a sufficient cause for taking an oath.

1222. Q. How is an oath usually taken?

A. An oath is usually taken by laying the hand on the Bible or by lifting the hand towards Heaven as a sign that we call God to witness that what we are saying is under oath and to the best of our knowledge really true.

1223. Q. What is perjury?

A. Perjury is the sin one commits who knowingly takes a false oath; that is, swears to the truth of what he knows to be false. Perjury is a crime against the law of our country and a mortal sin before God.

1232. Q. What is a vow?

A. A vow is a deliberate promise made to God to do something that is pleasing to Him.

1241. Q. What is blasphemy, and what are profane words?

A. Blasphemy is any word or action intended as an insult to God. To say He is cruel or find fault with His works is blasphemy. It is a much greater sin than cursing or taking God's name in vain. Profane words mean here bad, irreverent or irreligious words.

1242. Q. What is the third commandment?

A. The third commandment is: Remember thou keep holy the Sabbath day.

1243. Q. What are we commanded by the third commandment?

A. By the third commandment we are commanded to keep holy the Lord's day and the holy days of obligation, on which we are to give our time to the service and worship of God.

1245. Q. How are we to worship God on Sundays and holy days of obligation?

A. We are to worship God on Sundays and holy days of obligation by hearing Mass, by prayer, and by other good works.

1250. Q. Why does the Church command us to keep the Sunday holy instead of the Sabbath?

A. The Church commands us to keep the Sunday holy instead of the Sabbath because on Sunday Christ rose

from the dead, and on Sunday He sent the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles.

1252. Q. What is forbidden by the third commandment?

- A. The third commandment forbids all unnecessary work and whatever else may hinder the due observance of the Lord's day.

Questions and Exercises

Part 1: Yes or No

1. Is the belief that all religions are equally good known as indifferentism?
2. Is Catholic veneration of holy pictures and statues similar to the American devotion to historical pictures and statues?
3. Is a false oath called a “calumny”?
4. Are oaths used in courts of justice?
5. Has Sunday always been a day of worship dedicated to God?
6. Is it a sin of presumption to believe that we can be saved without the help of God?
7. Do we honor God by honoring the saints?
8. Is it a violation of the second commandment to call down evil on a person?
9. Are you ever allowed to do work on Sunday?
10. Is the rejection of one or more truths of the Catholic faith known as “apostasy”?

Part 2: Matching

COLUMN A

1. Chief external act of worship
2. Catholics worship God on Sunday
3. Careless and irreverent use of the names of God or the saints
4. Unnecessary work
5. Anything leading another to commit sin
6. Attention to Catholic sermons, literature, and other Catholic media
7. Bodies of the saints or objects connected with the saints or with our Lord
8. Catholics adore God
9. Sins against charity
10. Deliberately calling on God to bear witness to a lie

COLUMN B

- A. Scandal
- B. By attending the Sacrifice of the Mass
- C. Perjury
- D. Helps to know God
- E. Profanity
- F. Sloth, scandal, and envy
- G. Relics
- H. The Sacrifice of the Mass
- I. But venerate the saints
- J. Forbidden on Sundays

**FOR ME TO DO**

1. Group discussion: Explain why a Catholic might close his business on Sunday.
2. List ways in which members of the Church make open profession of their faith.
3. Write a letter to your friend and explain why Catholics have statues, pictures, and images in their homes and churches.
4. Write a paragraph on one of these topics: *Some Ways of Honoring Mary; Why It Is Right and Just to Thank God A Lesson From Mary's Life; How Jesus Worshiped His Father.*
5. Write a report on saints or outstanding characters who exemplify certain Christian virtues:
 - A. Thomas More . . . served God and died for love of Him.
 - B. St. Peter . . . performed a miracle through the power of the Holy Name.
 - C. St. Monica . . . exemplified perseverance.
 - D. Mary Magdalen . . . hoped in God's mercy.