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of Discussion Club Texts

*Love  
in  
Action*

By REV. LEO J. TRESE



CONFRATERNITY OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

N. C. W. C.



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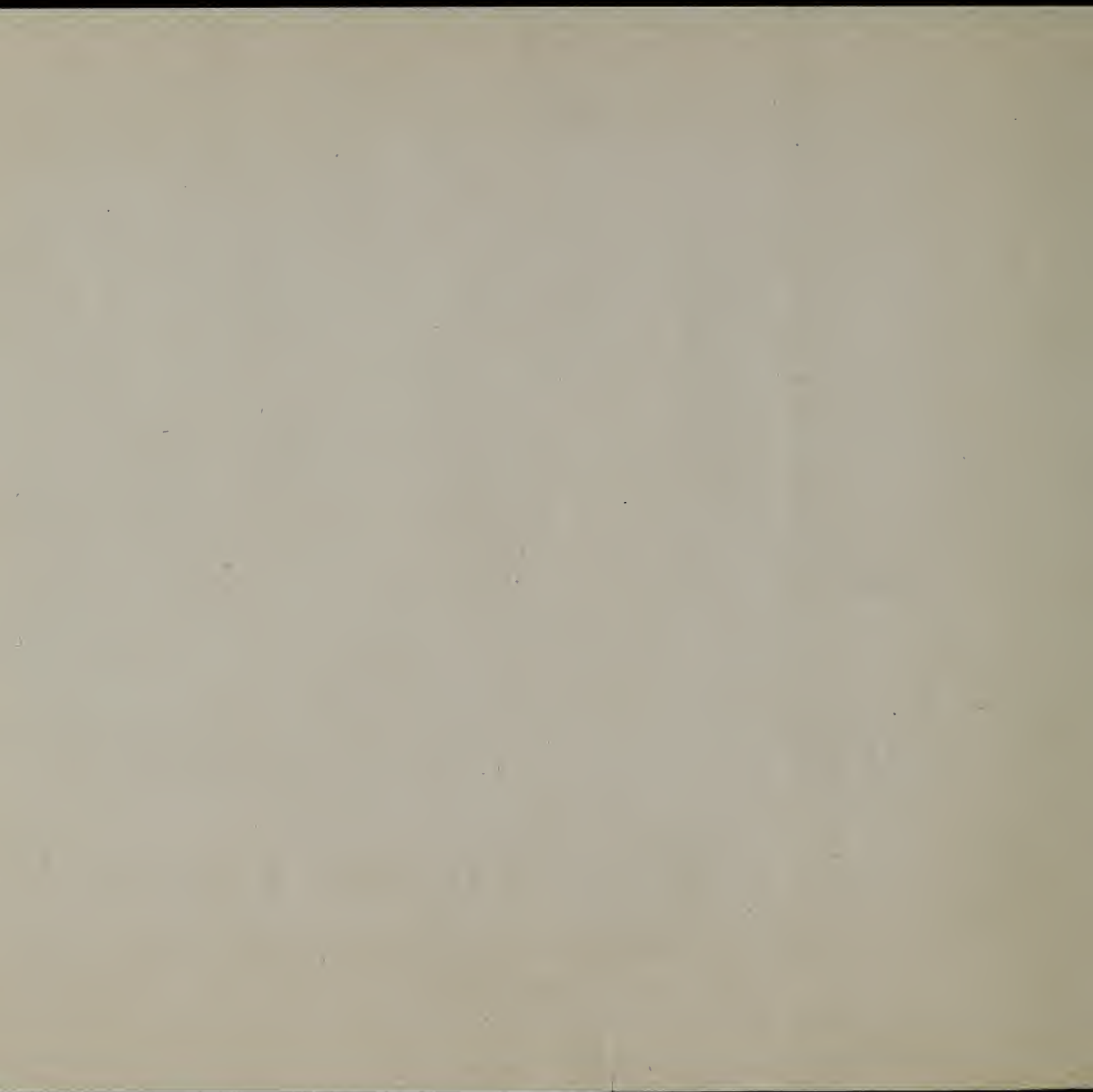
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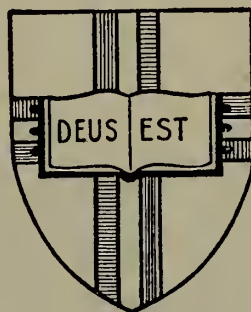




THIS WE BELIEVE SERIES  
of  
Discussion Club Texts

*SERIES 3*

**LOVE  
IN  
ACTION**  
(The Commandments)



By REV. LEO J. TRESE

Confraternity of Christian Doctrine  
N. C. W. C.

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✠ EDWIN V. O'HARA,

Archbishop-Bishop of Kansas City

December 28, 1955

This is a religious discussion club text based on the Revised Edition of the *Baltimore Catechism* (No. 3) and adapted to the knowledge and experience of the average group. It is arranged in two units for two eight-week discussion club periods, with discussion aids based exclusively on chapter content, definite application to daily Christian living, and suggested religious practices for putting information to work.

## ORDER OF MEETINGS

1. Open with prayer.
2. Roll call.
3. Brief review of previous meeting by secretary.
4. Report by secretary of replies to difficulties referred to the parish director.
5. Reading and discussion of current assignment. During discussion keep in mind each individual's obligation to practice an apostolate. Many recent discussion club texts terminate each chapter with a section entitled **My Apostolate**, under which members are reminded to:
  - Observe opportunities for application of the religious truths or principles to everyday life;
  - Consider means to remedy undesirable conditions;
  - Act to employ the means suggested.
6. Assignment of next lesson.
7. Announcement of time and place of next meeting.
8. Adjournment, with prayer.

### PRAYER TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

**C**OME, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of Thy faithful and enkindle in them the fire of Thy love.

V. Send forth Thy spirit and they shall be created;

R. And Thou shalt renew the face of the earth.

Let us pray.

O God, who didst instruct the hearts of the faithful by the light of the Holy Spirit, grant us in the same Spirit to be truly wise, and ever to rejoice in His consolation. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

— *Roman Missal*

*Indulgence of five years. Plenary indulgence, under the usual conditions, if the prayer has been recited daily for a month.*

— S. P. Ap., Dec. 22, 1932

## THE DISCUSSION CLUB

1. A religious discussion club is a group of six to twelve persons who meet weekly to discuss the teachings and practices of the Church, to clarify and correlate religious information in order to put religious truths into practice in daily living.
2. Religious discussion clubs are promoted under the guidance of the parish director, a priest who provides for the preparation of lay leaders and to whom questions that arise are submitted for decision.
3. The leader names a secretary whose duty it is to record questions on content or procedure that cannot be answered within the group. Before the next meeting these questions are referred by the secretary to the priest director.
4. The leader asks members of the group to read in turn passages of the text. One member reads aloud while the rest follow silently.
5. Discussion questions are answered in the text. They test accuracy of knowledge and clarity of statement. Members should be encouraged to ask additional questions. After each section is read, the leader asks the group as a whole, or members in turn, the questions listed under **Discussion**. If one member is unable to answer, another may volunteer information. Finally, the group considers the truths under discussion in their application to local or personal circumstances.
6. Questions raised should be submitted to the group before the leader attempts an answer. Unless all members agree that they have been answered satisfactorily, questions are to be submitted to the priest director.
7. Do not permit the group to spend too much time on a small portion of the text or to go off on a tangent into unrelated conversation. Avoid becoming absorbed in a controversy over a question of minor importance. Discussion is not debate or controversy. It is analysis expressed in one's own words.
8. Note that the suggestions under **My Apostolate** at the end of the chapter emphasize putting into immediate practice the truths presented in the text.



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## FAITH PROVEN BY DEEDS

“YES, I believe in our American democracy. I believe that a constitutional government of free citizens is the best government there is.” A man who would say that, but who at the same time would not vote or pay taxes or respect the laws of his country, would stand convicted by his own actions as a liar and a fraud.

It is equally plain that anyone who professes to believe the truths revealed by God will be completely insincere if he makes no effort to observe God’s law. It is easy to say, “I believe”; but our works are the real proof of the strength of our faith. “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven,” warns Jesus; “but he who does the will of My Father in heaven shall enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 7:21). Nothing could be clearer than that. If we believe in God, we must do what God asks, we must keep His law.

And let it be noted that God’s law is not composed of arbitrary “do’s” and “don’t’s” set up by God just to make the going hard for us. It is true that God’s law does test the strength of our moral fiber, but that is not its primary purpose. God is not a capricious God. He has not set up His commandments as so many hurdles to be cleared in an obstacle race for heaven. He is not sitting back, grimly waiting to pounce upon the first hapless mortal who falls on his face.

On the contrary, God’s law is an expression of God’s infinite love and infinite wisdom. If we buy a piece of machinery or a home appliance of some kind, we use it according to the manufacturer’s directions, if we are sensible people. We take it for granted that the man who made it knows best how it should be used in order to work effectively and give lasting satisfaction. Also, if we are sensible people, we give God credit for knowing what is best for the human nature which He has

created, what will contribute most to the good and the happiness of the individual and the race. We might say that God's law is simply the "book of instructions" which accompanies God's noble product, Man. More strictly speaking, we can say that the law of God is the expression of the divine wisdom in directing man to the fulfillment of his end and purpose. God's law does so by regulating man's own use of himself, as well as his relationships with God and with his fellow man.

To make graphic to ourselves the fact that God's law is aimed at man's happiness and well-being, we have only to consider what the world would be like if everyone obeyed God's law. There would be no crimes, and therefore no need for courts or policemen or prisons. There would be no greed or ambition, and therefore no need for armies and navies — no war. There would be no broken homes, no juvenile delinquency, no Alcoholics Anonymous. We know that as a result of Original Sin this kind of happy and beautiful world will never be. But it *can* be for us, individually. Just as the human race as a whole would find its truest happiness, even here upon earth, by identifying its will with God's, so can we. We were made to love God, here and hereafter. That is the purpose of our existence; *that* is where our highest happiness lies. And Jesus gives us the recipe for happiness very simply: "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15).

**Discussion:** 1. How does a man prove the genuineness of his citizenship? 2. What words of Jesus show that faith must prove itself by deeds? 3. What are some mistaken ideas about the reason for God's laws? 4. Why might we say that God's laws are His "book of instructions" for mankind? 5. What would the world be like if everyone kept God's laws? 6. What did Jesus say is the real test of our love for Him?

The law of God which governs human conduct is called the *moral* law, from a Latin word "mores," which means "way of acting." The moral law is distinguished from *physical* laws by which God governs the rest of the universe, such as the laws

of astronomy, the laws of physics, the laws of reproduction and growth. Physical laws bind all created nature by necessity. There is no escaping them, there is no freedom of choice. If you step off the edge of a roof, the law of gravity takes over inevitably — unless you substitute another physical law (of air pressure) by using a parachute. The moral law, however, binds us in a different way. It operates within the framework of free will. We *may not* disobey the moral law — but we *can* disobey. So we say that by the divine law we are morally bound but physically free. If we were not physically free, we could not merit. If we were not free, our obedience would not be an act of love.

Moral theologians, in discussing the divine law, distinguish between *natural* law and *positive* law. Conduct, such as the reverence of children towards parents, fidelity in marriage, respect for the person and the property of others, belongs to the very *nature* of man. Such conduct, which man's conscience (judgment guided by right reason) tells him is right, is called the natural law. Such conduct would be right and its opposite evil even if God had not specifically said so. Adultery would be wrong even if there were no sixth commandment. Violations of the natural law are said to be *intrinsically* evil; that is, wrong by their very nature. They have been wrong from the very beginning of the human race, even before God gave Moses the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai.

Besides the divine natural law, there also is the divine *positive* law. Under this heading are those actions which are good simply because God has commanded them or evil simply because God has forbidden them. They are actions whose goodness is not rooted in the very nature of man, but is imposed by God for the perfecting of man according to God's plan for him. A very simple example of divine positive law is the obligation we are under to receive the Holy Eucharist because of the explicit command of Christ.

Whether we consider divine natural law or divine positive law, it is in obedience to God that our happiness lies. "If thou wilt enter into life," Jesus says, "keep the commandments" (Matthew 19:17).

**Discussion:** 1. What is the origin of the word "moral"? 2. How would you explain the difference between a *physical* law and a *moral* law? 3. What do we mean by the term *natural* law? 4. How does divine *positive* law differ from the natural law? 5. What did Jesus say was necessary in order to get to heaven?

To love means not to count the cost. A mother would not dream of measuring the sweat and tears she expends upon her children. It would not occur to a husband to gauge his fatigue as he watches at the bedside of his sick wife. Love and sacrifice are almost synonymous terms. That is why obedience to God's law poses no problem to one who loves God. That is why Jesus sums up the whole of God's law in the two great commandments of love.

"And one of them, a doctor of the Law, putting Him [Jesus] to the test, asked Him, 'Master, which is the great commandment in the Law?' Jesus said to him, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. And the second is like it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets' " (Matthew 22:35-40).

Really the second is contained in the first. Because if we love God with our whole heart and soul, then we shall love all those who possess, either actually or potentially, a share of God's goodness; and we shall want for them what God wants for them. This means that we shall love ourselves in the right way, wanting for ourselves what God wants for us. That is, we shall want above all else to grow in love for God, which means growth in holiness; and we shall want, more than anything else, to be happy with God in heaven. Nothing will have any value for us if it in any way comes between us and God. And since our love for ourselves is the standard of our love for our neighbor (which means *everyone* except the devils and the damned souls in hell), we shall want for our neighbor what we want for ourselves. We shall want him too to grow in love

for God — to grow in holiness. We shall want him, also, to achieve the eternal happiness for which God made him.

This means, in turn, that we shall hate whatever may in any way hold our neighbor back from God. We shall hate the injustices and the man-made evils which may be obstacles to his growth in holiness. We shall hate racial injustice, sub-standard housing, inadequate pay, exploitation of the weak and the ignorant. We shall love and we shall labor for all that will contribute to our neighbor's goodness and happiness and fulfillment.

**Discussion:** 1. Explain the statement, "To love means not to count the cost." 2. What are the two great laws of love? 3. Explain how the second law of love is contained in the first. 4. What does it mean to love ourselves "in the right way"? 5. Who is our neighbor? 6. What are some of the things that might hold our neighbor back from God?

God has made the task somewhat easier for us by spelling out, in the Ten Commandments, our principal duties to God Himself, to our neighbor and to ourselves. The first three commandments outline for us our duties to God; the other seven indicate our principal duties to our neighbor — and indirectly to ourselves. The Ten Commandments were given by God originally, engraved on two slabs of stone, to Moses on Mount Sinai. They were ratified by our Lord Jesus Christ: "Do not think that I have come to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I have not come to destroy, but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17). Jesus "fulfilled" the Law in two ways.

First of all by pinpointing for us some specific duties to God and neighbor. These duties, scattered through the Gospels and the Epistles, are summarized for us in the spiritual and the corporal works of mercy. Secondly, Jesus clarified our duties for us, by giving His Church the right and the duty of interpreting and applying, in practical terms, the divine law. This is done in what we commonly call the commandments of the Church. It should be borne in mind that the commandments of the Church are not new and additional burdens placed upon

us, over and above God's commandments. The laws of the Church are simply interpretations and particular applications of God's law. For example, God commands us to devote some time to His worship. We say, "Yes, I want to do that. How?" And the Church answers, "Assist at Mass on all Sundays and holydays of obligation." This fact, the fact that the laws of the Church are ultimately applications of the laws of God, is a point worthy of emphasis. There are some, even some Catholics, who will rationalize sin by distinguishing between a law of God and a law of the Church, as though God could be set in opposition to Himself.

Here, then, are the divine directives which tell us how we shall fulfill our nature as human beings and how we shall achieve our destiny as redeemed souls: the Ten Commandments of God, the seven spiritual and the seven corporal works of mercy, and the commandments of God's Church.

These, of course, prescribe for us only the minimum of sanctity — the doing of God's will in matters that are of obligation. But there should be no limit, there *is* no limit, to growth in holiness. Genuine love for God will look beyond the letter of the law to the spirit of the law. We shall strive not merely to do what is good, but shall seek always to do what is better. For those who are not afraid to raise their sights high, our Lord Jesus Christ has proposed the observance of the so-called Evangelical Counsels: voluntary poverty, perpetual chastity, and perfect obedience.

Of each of these — the commandments of God and of His Church, the works of mercy, and the Evangelical Counsels — we shall speak in turn. And since the positive side is perhaps less familiar than the "Thou shalt not's," we shall begin with the works of mercy.

**Discussion:** 1. How do the first three commandments differ from the last seven? 2. Where and to whom did God give the Ten Commandments? 3. What was the first way in which Jesus "fulfilled" the law? 4. In what other way did Jesus clarify our duties? 5. How are the laws of the Church really particular applications of God's own laws? 6. What are the



three sets of directives which will help us to achieve our destiny? 7. Why do we say that there is no limit to growth in holiness?

#### MY APOSTOLATE:

1. As I recite my act of faith each morning, I shall resolve to *live* my faith throughout the day.
2. I shall make my morning act of love a prayer for *growth* in love, so that my obedience to God may be the obedience of love.
3. If a parent, I shall help my children to understand that God's commandments come from God's *love* for us.

### ACCENTING THE POSITIVE

IT IS unfortunate that, to many people, "leading a good life" means "keeping from sin." Actually, "keeping from sin" is only one side of the coin of virtue. It is necessary, but it is not enough. Perhaps this negative view of religion as a series of "Thou shalt not's" explains the cheerlessness in the spiritual lives of some well-intentioned souls. To keep from sin is an essential beginning, but love for God and neighbor calls for far more than this.

There are, for example, the corporal works of mercy. They are called "corporal" from the Latin word "corpus," meaning "body," because they pertain to our neighbor's physical and temporal welfare. As gleaned from the Bible, they are seven in number: (1) to feed the hungry; (2) to give drink to the thirsty; (3) to clothe the naked; (4) to visit the imprisoned; (5) to shelter the homeless; (6) to visit the sick; and (7) to bury the dead. In His description of the Last Judgment (Matthew 25:34-40), our Lord Jesus Christ makes our performance of these corporal works of mercy the test of our love for Himself: "Amen I say to you, as long as you did it for one of these, the least of My brethren, you did it for Me."

When we turn to examine the ways in which we can perform the corporal works of mercy, we find that there are three directions in which our efforts can be directed. First of all, there are what we call "organized charities." In our modern cities it is easy for the poor and the unfortunate to be overlooked in the crowd. Moreover, some needs are too big for any single person to care for. And so we have all sorts of social service agencies to which those in need of help can turn. There are hospitals, homes for orphans, homes for the aged, institutions for wayward and for handicapped children, the St. Vincent

de Paul Society — to mention a few. When we contribute to these, whether we do so directly or through a Catholic Charities drive or a Community Chest campaign, we are discharging *some* of our obligations to our neighbor-in-need but not all.

Another way in which we practice the corporal works of mercy is by our participation in movements for civic and for social betterment. If we work for better and more adequate housing for low-income families; if we work to ameliorate the injustices suffered by migrant agricultural laborers; if we lend support to every just effort of labor unions to obtain a living wage and economic security; if we give active encouragement to credit unions, consumer co-operatives, maternity guilds, and every other kind of self-help plan that will make life a little less burdensome for our neighbor — then we are practicing the corporal works of mercy. We are ministering to Christ-in-our-neighbor.

Discussion: 1. How might we explain the cheerlessness of the spiritual life of some people? 2. What is the origin of the term "corporal works of mercy"? 3. Which are the seven corporal works of mercy? 4. In what words did Jesus make our performance of the corporal works of mercy a test of our love for Him? 5. Why is there a need for organized charities? 6. Why are movements for civic and social betterment also corporal works of mercy?

But none of this will relieve us, of course, from the obligation to render direct and personal help to our brethren when the opportunity — or, rather let me say, when the *privilege* — of doing so presents itself. I dare not say to the poor man at my door, "I gave to the Community Chest; go and talk to them." Let us note, too, that Christ has many disguises. If we try to be too "prudent" in our giving, scientifically assaying the "worthiness" of a need, inevitably there will come a time when Christ will catch us napping. Jesus spoke often of the poor, but never did He say anything about the "worthy" poor. If it is for love of Christ that we give, then the worthiness or unworthiness

of the recipient will not concern us much. We should not encourage idleness by *imprudent* giving; but we have need to remember this: to neglect giving help to a poor family on the plea that they are a shiftless lot, or the father drinks, or the mother is a poor manager (which means that we punish the children for the defects of their parents) is to endanger the salvation of our soul. The truth is as stark as that.

There are other ways, obviously, in which we practice the corporal works of mercy besides providing food and clothing and rent-money to those in dire distress. In today's world it is not so easy to "visit the imprisoned" as it was in our Lord's time. Most prisoners are limited in visitors to members of their own immediate families. But it is possible for us to contact the chaplains of prisons and jails and to ask what we can supply that will be helpful to the prisoners. Rosaries, prayer-books, scapulars? Cigarettes, reading material, games? (It so easily could be you or I behind those bars!) Even better than visiting the imprisoned is work that will *prevent* imprisonment. Whatever we can do to make our neighborhood a more wholesome place, by providing recreation facilities and creative activities for youth, extending a helping hand to a youngster teetering on the edge of delinquency — such works as these will more than qualify with Christ.

"To visit the sick." How fortunate are physicians and nurses, whose entire lives are devoted to the fulfillment of the sixth corporal work of mercy — provided, of course, that it is love for God which animates their work and not merely money or "humanitarian" motives. But the illness of our brethren is a Christian challenge to all of us. Christ goes with us in each call that we pay to one of His suffering members; a call that will comfort and cheer, even if it does not heal. Time spent in reading to a convalescent or a blind person, or in relieving a wife for a few hours from the care of a sick husband or child — there is tremendous merit in any of these. Even a get-well card, sent out of love for Christ, will win His smile.

"To bury the dead." No longer do we make rough-boxes and dig graves for our neighbors here in America. But when we visit a house of mourning (more likely a funeral home

nowadays) we are honoring Christ, whose grace sanctified the body which we respect. When we attend a funeral, we are watching with Mary at the tomb. The pallbearer can quite truthfully tell himself that it is Christ (in his neighbor) that he is carrying to the grave.

**Discussion:** 1. Why does the "unworthiness" of a poor person not excuse us from the practice of a work of mercy? 2. What are some ways in which we can fulfill the work of mercy of "visiting the imprisoned"? 3. In what ways may we discharge our duties to the sick? 4. How may the corporal work of mercy of "burying the dead" be practiced nowadays?

When we labor, out of love for God, to ease the burdens of our fellow man, we do something very pleasing to God. When we strive, by means of the corporal works of mercy, to lighten our neighbor's load of sickness and poverty and misfortune, heaven indeed does smile upon us. Yet man's *eternal* happiness is of immensely greater importance than his physical and temporal well-being. Consequently, the *spiritual* works of mercy exert an even more pressing claim upon the Christian than do the corporal works.

The spiritual works of mercy are traditionally listed as seven. They are: (1) to admonish the sinner; (2) to instruct the ignorant; (3) to counsel the doubtful; (4) to comfort the sorrowful; (5) to bear wrongs patiently; (6) to forgive all injuries; (7) to pray for the living and the dead.

"To admonish the sinner" is a duty that rests most urgently upon parents and only a little less urgently upon teachers and others who may be charged with the formation of youthful character. The duty is plain; what is *not* always so clearly perceived is that example speaks to youth so much more loudly than precept. If there is intemperance in the home, if there is too great a preoccupation with money and worldly success, if there is uncharitable talk in the presence of the children or constant angry bickering between the parents, if Dad makes, and brags of, petty chiselings and Mom is heard telling polite lies over

the telephone — well, may God have mercy on the children whom they are schooling in sin.

It is not only parents and teachers, of course, who have the duty to “admonish the sinner.” To all of us belongs the responsibility of leading others to virtue, according to the degree of our influence. It is a duty that must be discharged with intelligence and prudence. Sometimes a sinner will only become more obstinate in his sin when corrected, especially if the correction is administered with any appearance of self-righteousness. (“I am *not* drunk; lea’ me alone; Charlie, another double Scotch.”) It is essential that our admonitions be made gently and with evident love, with a consciousness of our own faults and weaknesses.

However, prudence must not be pushed to the point of cowardice. If I have certain knowledge that my good friend is using contraceptives or indulging in marital infidelity or contemplating marriage outside the Church or is endangering his salvation in any other way, then love for God *demand*s that I do my utmost to dissuade him from spiritual suicide. It is cowardice of the worst sort if I try to excuse myself by saying: “Well, he knows what is right and wrong as well as I do. Let him live his own life. It’s not my business to tell him what to do.” I certainly would consider it my business if I saw him holding a gun to his head or a knife at his throat, however much he might object to my “interference.” Surely his spiritual life ought to mean more to me than his physical life. And let us hear what our own reward will be: “My brethren, if any one of you strays from the truth and someone brings him back, he ought to know that he who causes a sinner to be brought back from his misguided way will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins” (James 5:19-20).

**Discussion:** 1. Why do the spiritual works of mercy exert an even more pressing claim upon us than do the corporal works? 2. Which are the spiritual works of mercy? 3. Upon whom does the duty to “admonish the sinner” rest most urgently? 4. Why is the example of parents so important? 5. Why must we avoid self-righteousness when we admonish

a sinner? 6. When is prudence sometimes used as a cloak for cowardice? 7. What does St. James say about a person who brings back a sinner?

“To instruct the ignorant.” The human intellect is a gift of God which God wants us to use. All truth, both natural and supernatural, has its source in God and reflects God’s infinite perfection. Consequently, anyone who contributes to developing the human mind and to imparting the truth is doing a truly Christian work if he be motivated by love of God and neighbor. Here again parents play the primary part, with teachers second only to parents. This includes teachers in public schools, even though they be limited to secular subjects; *all* truth is God’s truth. It is not hard to see why teaching is such a noble vocation, one which can be made a real road to sanctity.

It is true, of course, that religious knowledge is the highest knowledge. Those who teach parish Religion Schools and in Catholic schools and colleges are practicing the second spiritual work of mercy in the fullest possible way. Even those of us who help to build and support such schools and catechetical centers, whether at home or in mission lands, share in the merit that comes from instructing the ignorant.

“To counsel the doubtful” may be passed over without much comment. Most of us love to give advice. Just let us be sure, when called upon for counsel, that our advice is one hundred per cent sincere and disinterested and based on the principles of faith. Let us be sure on the one hand that we do not take the easy way out by giving the person the advice we know he wants to hear, regardless of its merits; nor, on the other hand, give advice that is based on our own selfish self-interests. “To comfort the sorrowful” also comes quite naturally to most of us. If we are normal human beings, we feel a natural sympathy with those in trouble. Here, however, it is essential that the comfort we offer be more than a matter of shallow words and sentimental sniffing. If there is anything we can *do* to extend comfort, we shall not fail because it means personal inconvenience or sacrifice. Our comforting words will be fortified a thousand times over by our deeds.

“To bear wrongs patiently” and “To forgive all injuries.” Ah, there *is* the rub. All that is human in us, all that is merely natural, cries out against the reckless driver who cut in front of us, the friend who betrayed us, the neighbor who spread lies about us, the clerk who cheated us. It is here that we touch the tenderest nerve of self-love. It is so hard to say, with Christ on His cross, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” Yet, say it we must, or we are not Christ’s own. It is in this that our love for God passes its supreme test—it is in this that our love for neighbor proves itself to be genuinely supernatural.

Finally, “To pray for the living and the dead.” We all do, of course; if we know what it means to be a member of Christ’s Mystical Body and of the Communion of Saints. But even here selfishness would enter if our prayers were limited to our own needs and those of our own family and immediate friends. The circle of our prayers must encompass the world—as does the love of God.

**Discussion:** 1. Why can all teachers consider that they are performing a work of mercy? 2. How may all of us share in the merit that comes from instructing the ignorant? 3. Of what must we be sure when we are called upon to counsel the doubtful? 4. When is “comforting the sorrowful” more than a matter of words? 5. In which of the works of mercy does our love for God pass the supreme test? 6. When would our prayers “for the living and the dead” be selfish ones?

#### MY APOSTOLATE:

1. I shall inquire about the possibility of giving some of my time in volunteer service to some social or charitable agency, such as a hospital, old people’s home, or orphanage.
2. If not already so engaged, I shall offer my services to the local Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, to assist in any way in which I may be useful.
3. If there is any local civic movement which is aimed at making life better for my fellow citizens, I shall take an active and generous part in it.



### THE GREATER GOOD

“IF YOU love Me,” God says, “this is what you *must* do” — and He gives us His commandments. “If you love Me a *lot*,” God adds, “this is what you *may* do” — and He gives us the Evangelical Counsels, the invitation to practice voluntary poverty, perpetual chastity, and perfect obedience. They are called “Evangelical” Counsels from the Latin word for Gospel, which is “Evangelium”; and it is, of course, in the Gospels that Jesus extends to us His invitation to perfection.

It may be worth while to quote here in its entirety the poignant incident which St. Matthew describes for us in the nineteenth chapter of his Gospel (verses 16-20): “And behold, a certain man came to him and said, ‘Good Master, what good work shall I do to have eternal life?’ He said to him, ‘Why dost thou ask Me about what is good? One there is who is good, and He is God. But if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.’ He said to Him, ‘Which?’ And Jesus said, ‘Thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness, honor thy father and mother, and, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.’

“The young man said to Him, ‘All these I have kept; what is yet wanting to me?’ Jesus said to him, ‘If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.’ But when the young man had heard the saying, he went away sad, for he had great possessions.”

We feel a pang of pity for this young man who came so close to being one of our Lord’s first disciples, yet lost the glorious opportunity because his courage failed. There can be no doubt that still today Jesus continues to issue His invitation to great numbers of souls. There is so much of His work to be done in the world, and so many helpers are needed. If the number of His helpers is insufficient (and it always is), it is

not because Jesus is failing to call them. It can only be because His voice is not being heard; or because many who hear are lacking in the courage to follow, like the young man in the Gospel. That is why it is essential that all of us, parents and young people alike, understand the nature of the Evangelical Counsels, and the nature of a vocation to the religious life.

Of all the directives and advice given us in the Gospels, the Counsels are the most perfect. The observance of them will free us, so far as human nature can be freed, from all obstacles to growth in holiness, to growth in love for God. He who embraces the Counsels renounces those precious but lesser goods, those loves which in fallen human nature so often compete with love for God. In espousing voluntary poverty we manacle covetousness and greed, the twin villains responsible for so many sins against God and neighbor. In dedicating ourselves to perfect chastity we discipline the flesh so that the spirit may rise unfettered and undivided to God. In adhering to perfect obedience we make the hardest renunciation of all; we give up what is more dear to man than pride of possessions or power of procreation; we give up dominion over our own will. Emptied of self as completely as man can be — without property, without family, without self-will — we are as free as man can be for the operation of God's grace; we are on the path to perfection.

**Discussion:** 1. Which are the Evangelical Counsels and why are they so called? 2. In your own words, tell the story of Jesus and the rich young man. 3. What are some of the reasons for the lack of sufficient helpers in Christ's work of saving souls? 4. Which of the three Evangelical Counsels is, for most people, the hardest to embrace?

The *spirit* of the Evangelical Counsels is necessary for all of us, if we have any desire at all to advance in holiness. For all of us, married or single, in religion or out of religion, it is necessary that we preserve a spirit of detachment from worldly goods, cultivating simplicity in our tastes and our wants, generously sharing of our surplus with others less fortunate, grateful

to God for what He has given us, the while we grasp the gift very lightly in case God should want it back from us again.

For everyone, too, chastity according to his state in life is a must. For the single person this means absolute chastity, with or without benefit of vow. And it is, surely, one of the glories of our religion that so many do practice perfect chastity, even while living in a world where seductions abound and easy opportunities for sin are plentiful. There is real heroism in the purity of our youth, who must keep the strong urge of their procreative power in check until age and circumstances make it possible for them to marry. There is a quieter but no less real heroism in the chastity of older single persons whose situation is such that they cannot marry — perhaps not ever. There is a noble heroism in the continency of those who have chosen a single life in the world as their lot, freely, so that they may more fully give themselves to the service of others. There is in these unmarried laity a deep sense of reverence for sex as an awesome gift of God; a gift to be used only for God's purposes and to be preserved untarnished so long as those purposes are not possible. And in marriage, too, there is chastity; the beautiful chastity of truly Christian spouses, to whom physical union is not a plaything or a mere tool for self-gratification but rather a joyous expression of an inner and spiritual unity with each other and with God, for the doing of His will, with no family limitation but that of abstinence when that would seem to better serve the purposes of God.

There is obedience, likewise, in the world — that subjection of will which true love of God and neighbor so often makes mandatory. This means not only the subjection of a youthful will to parents and other persons of authority. It means not only the subjection of will on the part of all of us to the voice of God in His Church and to the will of God in the so-often frustrating circumstances of life. It means the daily subjection of will and the disciplining of desire in all who would live in peace and charity with others — between spouse and spouse, between neighbor and neighbor.

Yes indeed; the spirit of the Counsels — poverty, chastity and obedience — is not limited to the enclosure of convent or monastery walls.

**Discussion:** 1. How do we observe the *spirit* of poverty? 2. What is the attitude towards sex of single persons living chastely in the world? 3. What is the attitude towards sex of persons living chastely in Christian marriage? 4. What are some of the ways in which all of us practice the spirit of obedience?

The spirit of poverty, chastity, and obedience is essential to any thoroughly Christian life. And it is to the spirit of the Evangelical Counsels, rather than to their absolute observance, that most Christians are called. The Mystical Body of Christ *is* a body and not merely a soul. Hence there must be Christian parents who will perpetuate the membership of that Body. Moreover, if the spirit of Christ is to permeate the world, there must be exemplars of Christ in all walks of life; there must be Christian men and women in the trades and businesses and professions. For them, the fulfillment of the Counsels must be in a relative degree.

But there can be no "relative" degree unless there exists an absolute degree to which the relative can be compared. I can say that my watch is relatively accurate in keeping time only because there is a Naval Observatory which is absolutely accurate in fixing the time. I can say that this picture is a good reproduction only if there is an original from which it was reproduced.

That is why — one reason why — God in His providence has developed in the Church the state of life known as the religious state. It is in the religious state that the Evangelical Counsels are espoused in their completeness, by the vows of absolute poverty, perpetual chastity, and perfect obedience. The religious life is called the life of perfection. Not because a person automatically becomes perfect by pronouncing the three vows of religion; but because he has set his foot upon the path to perfection by divesting himself of all that might hinder him in his progress towards perfection. How perfect he may actually

become, after his brave start, will depend upon the use he makes of his plentiful graces and opportunities.

It is obvious that there are many people living "in the world" who are more saintly than many of the people living "in religion." It is equally obvious that no one should feel that he is condemned to an "imperfect" life because he is not a monk or she a nun. The most perfect life for any individual is the state of life to which God has called that individual. There are saints in the kitchen as well as in the cloister, in the shop as well as in the chapel. But absolutely speaking and on its merits, aside from the particular vocation of any individual, the religious life is the life of perfection. In its beginnings the religious life is as old as the Christian Church. The religious life as we know it today, a beautiful mosaic of many Orders and Congregations, had its origin in the "Virgins" and the "Confessors" of the primitive Church.

**Discussion:** 1. Why are most Christians called to observe only the *spirit* of the Evangelical Counsels rather than their absolute observance? 2. Why does a *relative* observance of the Evangelical Counsels call for their *absolute* observance by some? 3. Under what circumstances are the Counsels espoused completely? 4. Why is the religious life called a life of perfection? 5. What is the most perfect life for any particular individual?

Besides the world's need for a living witness to the fact that love for God can supplant every lesser love in the human heart — that is, besides the need for an "absolute" pattern from which the "relative" may derive — there is another reason for God's providential promotion of the religious life. The Precious Blood of Jesus cries out for the souls for whom He died with an urgency that will not be stilled. The number is so great and the work so vast that there is need for a host of selfless and dedicated souls who will give themselves, without any competing distraction, to the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. There is need for powerhouses of prayer whence may flow the graces needed by those too heedless to pray for themselves; and so we have the strictly cloistered Orders of monks and nuns whose

whole lives are given to the practice of prayer and penance for Christ's Mystical Body.

There is need for countless hands and hearts to care for the sick and the homeless and the unfortunate, to visit homes and seek out the stray sheep, to teach in schools and colleges where God will be recognized as well as Julius Caesar and William Shakespeare, to teach catechism and preach missions. And so we have the religious Congregations of men and women who perform these works of charity, not for pay or prestige or self-satisfaction, but out of love for God and souls. Only God knows how much of this work would have to go undone otherwise. With God's Providence abreast of modern needs, we have, too, the recent development of "secular institutes." In secular institutes the members, men or women, bind themselves to the observance of the Evangelical Counsels but live and dress as laymen or laywomen. They are able thus to go places and perform works that would be impossible to the conventual religious.

Those who enter religious life bind themselves by vows to the practice of poverty, chastity, and obedience. The vows may be taken for life, or for a specified number of years. But before *any* vows are made there is a period of spiritual formation and testing called the "novitiate." This may last for one or two years and is followed by temporary vows, which permit a further time of self-trial for three years or more before final vows may be pronounced.

The religious life is open to any unmarried person past fifteen years of age who is not hindered by obligations or impediments which would be incompatible with the religious life; for example, the obligation to support a sick or disabled parent. If one has normal physical and mental health, nothing further is needed except the right intention: the desire to please God, to save one's soul, to help one's neighbor. Considering the pressing need, it can be held as certain that God is speaking to many such souls who are not heeding His invitation. Perhaps they are not listening to His voice—He does speak softly, always. Perhaps they hear but are afraid of the cost; not realizing that if the call is from God He will give the needed

strength. Perhaps they hear and have the courage but are deterred by well-meaning parents who counsel caution and delay — until God's voice is stilled and the vocation lost. As though we should ever be "cautious" with God! As though it were not better to have tried and given up than not to have tried at all. It should be a daily intention in the prayers of all of us that all whom God is calling may hear His voice and answer; and that all who answer may have the grace to persevere.

**Discussion:** 1. Besides the need for an absolute pattern of perfection, what is another reason for God's promotion of the religious life? 2. Why do we need cloistered communities of monks and nuns? 3. What are some of the works which require religious Congregations of the *active* type? 4. What is a "secular institute"? 5. What is a "novitiate"? 6. Mention some of the requirements for a vocation to the religious life. 7. Why do some souls not heed Christ's invitation to the religious life?

#### MY APOSTOLATE:

1. Each morning I shall renew my determination to make God's will my will this day, no matter what the circumstances of the day may be.
2. I shall try to develop a spirit of simplicity in my own wants and try to let no week pass without giving something, in some way, to charity.
3. If a parent, I shall pray each day that God may deign to call one of my children to His service — and shall give every encouragement to any child of mine who shows an inclination towards the religious life or the priesthood.

### OUR FIRST DUTY

**M**AN'S highest destiny is to give honor and glory to God. It is for this that we were made. Any lesser reason for creating us would have been unworthy of God. It is quite correct to say that God made us for eternal happiness with Himself. But our own happiness is the secondary reason for our existence; it is the consequence of fulfilling the prime purpose for which we were fashioned: to glorify God.

It is not surprising, then, that the first of the Ten Commandments reminds us of this obligation. "I am the Lord thy God," the Lord wrote for Moses on the tablets of stone; "thou shalt not have strange gods before Me." That is the condensed form of the first commandment as we learned it from our Catechism. Actually, as it is given in the Bible in the Book of Exodus (chapter 20, verses 2 to 6) the first commandment is much longer: "I, the Lord, am your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of slavery. You shall not have other gods besides Me. You shall not carve idols for yourselves in the shape of anything in the sky above or on the earth below or in the waters beneath the earth; you shall not bow down before them or worship them. For I, the Lord, your God, am a jealous God, inflicting punishment for their fathers' wickedness on the children of those who hate Me, down to the third and fourth generation; but bestowing mercy down to the thousandth generation, on the children of those who love Me and keep My commandments."

That is the first commandment in its entirety. It may be of interest to note here that the commandments, as God gave them, were not neatly numbered from one to ten. The arrangement of the commandments into ten divisions as a memory help is a man-made arrangement. Before the invention of printing tended to standardize things, the commandments were numbered now



one way and now another. Quite often the long first commandment was divided into two: "I, the Lord, am your God. . . . you shall not have other gods besides Me." That was the first commandment. The second was, "You shall not carve idols for yourselves. . . . you shall not bow down before them or worship them." This was the second commandment. Then, to keep the round number of ten, the last two commandments, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife . . . nor anything else that belongs to him," were combined as a single commandment. At the time that Martin Luther started the first Protestant church, this is the system of numbering which he chose. The other system of numbering, so familiar to us, became standardized as the one used by the Catholic Church. That is why our second commandment is, for most Protestants, the third; our third is their fourth, and so on. In a Protestant catechism, it is the seventh rather than the sixth commandment which forbids adultery. In both cases the commandments are the same; it is just a difference in numbering.

We referred to the number ten as a memory help. It is worth remembering that the commandments themselves were intended by God as memory helps, even aside from any system of numbering. On Mount Sinai God did not impose upon humankind any *new* obligations except the setting aside of a specific day for Himself. From the day of Adam the natural law required of man the practice of divine worship, and justice, and truthfulness, and chastity, and the other moral virtues. On the tablets of stone, God simply was putting the natural law required of man the practice of divine worship, and forgetfulness. But not even on Mount Sinai did God give an exhaustive treatise on the moral law. He was content to list a few of the graver sins against the greater virtues: idolatry against religion, profanity against reverence, murder and theft against justice, perjury against veracity and charity — and left it to us to use these virtues as headings, under which we can group all duties of a similar nature. We might say that the Ten Commandments are like ten hooks on the wall, upon which we can neatly arrange and hang our moral obligations.

**Discussion:** 1. For what purpose did God create us? 2. What is the short form of the first commandment? 3. Why do most Protestant churches have a system of numbering the commandments different from that of the Catholic Church? 4. Why did God give us the Ten Commandments? 5. When did such things as theft and murder begin to be sins?

Returning now to a specific consideration of the first commandment, we think it safe to say that few of us are in any danger of committing the sin of idolatry in a literal sense. Figuratively speaking, there may be many people who worship the false god of self. This would apply to anyone who might place money, business or social advancement, worldly pleasure or bodily comfort ahead of his duty to God. These sins of self-worship, however, usually fall under some other commandment than the first.

Assuming, then, that the sin of idolatry is no problem for us, we can direct our attention to the *positive* meaning of the first commandment. It is true of most of the first commandment, as it is true of most of the others, that the negative form, "Thou shalt not," is a literary device which emphasizes, in capsule form, our positive duties. Thus, by the first commandment we are commanded to offer to God alone the supreme worship that is due Him as our Creator and our final destiny. And that positive obligation of giving supreme worship covers a lot more ground than merely abstaining from idolatry.

It cannot too often be repeated that to lead a good life calls for much more than mere abstention from sin. Virtue, like a coin, has two sides to it. To keep oneself from what is positively evil is only one side of the coin. On the other side is the necessity of performing the *good* actions which are the very opposite of the bad ones which we have renounced. And so it is not enough to pass by a heathen idol without tipping our hat. We also must actively offer to the true God the worship that is His due. The Catechism sums up our duties in this respect by saying that "we worship God by acts of faith, hope, and charity, and by adoring Him and praying to Him."

**Discussion:** 1. What are some of the ways in which we might worship "self"? 2. What is the *positive* meaning of the first commandment? 3. Besides abstaining from evil, what else does a good life call for? 4. How does the Catechism sum up our duties under the first commandment?

In religion, everything begins with faith. Without faith there is nothing. In examining, then, the Catechism statement, "We worship God by acts of faith, hope, and charity, and by adoring Him and praying to Him," it is to the virtue of faith that we first turn our attention.

The virtue of faith, we know, is infused into our souls, along with sanctifying grace, when we are baptized. But the virtue of faith would lie dormant in our soul if we did not put it to use by making *acts* of faith. We make an act of faith whenever we give conscious assent to the truths which God has revealed; not necessarily because we fully understand the truths; not necessarily because the truths have been scientifically demonstrated to our satisfaction; but primarily because God has revealed the truths. God, being infinitely wise, cannot make a mistake. God, being infinitely truthful, cannot lie. Consequently, when God says that something is so, we can ask for no greater certainty than that. There is more certainty in God's word than in all the test-tubes and all the logical reasoning in the world.

It is easy to see why an act of faith is an act of worship offered to God. When we say, "O my God, I believe these . . . truths because Thou hast revealed them, who canst neither deceive nor be deceived," we are honoring God's infinite wisdom and truthfulness in the most practical way possible; we are taking things on His say-so.

This duty of worshiping God by faith imposes upon us certain definite obligations. God does not do things without a reason. It is evident that, if God makes particular truths known to mankind, it is because those truths will be in some way helpful to man in fulfilling his destiny — which is to give glory to God through knowledge and love and service. It becomes our responsibility, then, to learn what those truths are, according to our capacity and opportunities.

For a person who is not a Catholic, this means that the moment he begins to suspect that he does not possess the true religion revealed by God he immediately is bound to seek it. When he has found it, he is bound to embrace it — to make his act of faith. Perhaps we should not judge, since only God can read the heart. But every priest encounters, in the course of this work, persons who seem to be convinced that the Catholic faith is the true faith and yet remain outside the Church. It seems that they count the cost too great: loss of friends, or of business, or of prestige. Sometimes their motive is fear of giving offense to parents, as though loyalty to human parents should ever come before our higher loyalty to our Father, God.

**Discussion:** 1. When do we receive the virtue of faith? 2. When we make an act of faith, what is the reason why we give assent to God's truths? 3. Why are the truths of faith the most certain of all truths? 4. Why is an act of faith also an act of worship? 5. Why does God make certain truths known to mankind? 6. Why do some persons fail to become Catholics even though they are convinced of the truths which the Church teaches?

As for us who already possess the true faith, we must be sure that we do not rest upon our laurels. We must not complacently assume that, because we attended a Catholic school or Catechism class in our youth, we know all that we need to know about our religion. An adult mind needs an adult understanding of God's truths. To listen attentively to sermons and religious instructions, to read Catholic books and periodicals, to take an active part in religious discussion clubs — these are not mere matters of choice, to be indulged in if we feel like it. These are not "pious practices" for "devout souls." *Some* degree of growth in a knowledge of our faith is an essential duty, stemming from the first commandment. We cannot make an act of faith in a truth or truths which we do not even know. Many of our temptations against faith, if we have any, would disappear if we took the trouble to learn more about our faith.

The first commandment not only obliges us to seek to know the truths of God and to accept them. It requires of us also that we make *acts* of faith, that we worship God by giving explicit assent of our minds to His truths, once we have reached the use of reason. How often *must* I make an act of faith? It goes without saying that I *should* do so often. But I *must* make an act of faith any time that I learn of a revealed truth of God that I did not know before. I *must* make an act of faith any time it is needed in order to resist a temptation against faith or against some other virtue where faith is involved. I *must* make an act of faith frequently during life — that the virtue of faith may not become inactive within me for lack of exercise. The practice of good Catholics generally is to make an act of faith as a part of their daily prayers, morning and night.

Not only must we seek to know the truth. Not only must we give interior assent to the truth. The first commandment requires also that we make outward *profession* of our faith. This obligation becomes operative whenever God's honor or our neighbor's good might otherwise suffer. God's honor suffers any time that failure to profess our faith is equivalent to a denial of our faith. This obligation does not apply only to those extreme cases where an outright demand is made upon one to deny his faith — as in ancient Rome or modern Communist countries. It applies also in the daily lives of all of us. We may fear to profess our faith because it will mean a loss of business, or because it will make us "conspicuous," or because we fear raised eyebrows or ridicule. The Catholic man attending a convention, the Catholic student attending a secular university, a Catholic woman attending her card club — in these and a hundred similar instances, there easily can arise circumstances when to hide one's faith will be equivalent to denial — and God's honor will suffer.

And so often when we fail, through cowardice, to profess our faith, our neighbor suffers too. So often a weaker brother (or sister) is just waiting to see what we do before making his own decision. Indeed, there may be times when there is no particular need for us to make open profession of our faith except the need of someone else for the strength and courage our example will give.

**Discussion:** 1. What are some of the ways in which we can grow in a knowledge of our faith? 2. Besides seeking to know the truths of God, what else does the first commandment require of us? 3. At what times *must* we make an act of faith? 4. Besides seeking to know the truth and giving assent to the truth, what else does the first commandment require of us? 5. Aside from actual persecution what are some of the reasons that might tempt a person to conceal his faith? 6. Why does our neighbor often suffer when we fail to profess our faith?

#### MY APOSTOLATE:

1. I shall pray the act of faith thoughtfully and devoutly every night and morning.
2. I shall offer at least one Our Father every day for some non-Catholic whom I know to be interested in the Catholic faith.
3. I shall set aside a little time each week for the purpose of learning more about my faith — whether it be in a discussion club or through reading of Catholic books and periodicals.

## SINS AGAINST FAITH

THE first commandment obliges us to find out what God has revealed, to believe firmly what God has revealed. This is what it means to practice the virtue of faith. Any time we deliberately fail in one of these three directions we are guilty of a sin against faith.

But there are certain specific and grievous sins against faith which merit special mention. There is first of all the sin of apostasy. The word "apostate" may look something like the word "apostle"; in meaning, however, the two words are almost opposites. An apostle is one who spreads the faith. An apostate is one who completely abandons the faith. Apostates are to be found in almost every parish: people who will tell you that they once were Catholics but that they don't believe in any of it any more. Very often apostasy is the end-result of a bad marriage. First a Catholic excommunicates himself by marrying out of the Church before a non-Catholic clergyman, perhaps to a divorced person or to a partner who refuses to be married by a priest. Cut off from the flow of God's grace, the excommunicated Catholic's faith withers and dies, and he ends up with no faith at all.

Apostasy is not the same thing as laxity. There may be a lax Catholic who hasn't attended Mass or received Holy Communion for ten years. Usually sheer laziness is at the root of such neglect. "I work hard all week; I need my rest on Sunday morning," he may say. If you ask this man what his religion is, he will answer, "Why, I'm a Catholic, of course." Usually he will go on to defend himself by saying that he is a better Catholic than "lots of people who go to church every Sunday." That is an overworked piece of rationalization that every priest has to listen to time and time again.

The point is, however, that this lax Catholic is not yet an apostate. In a vague sort of way he does intend, at some time in the formless future, to get back to the practice of his religion. If he dies before doing so, he will not necessarily be denied Christian burial — not if the pastor can find any evidence at all that the man did still retain his faith and was repentant at the hour of death. It is a mistaken notion that the Church denies Christian burial to everyone who missed his so-called “Easter duty.” It is true the Church does take Easter-time Communion as plain evidence that a person does profess the true faith. If that evidence is at hand, then no further questions need be asked. But the Church is still the loving Mother even of her wayward children. She will lean over backwards to give Christian burial if there is any evidence at all that the dead person still professed the true faith and was sorry for his sins — provided the person did not die excommunicated or manifestly unrepentant. Christian burial by no means guarantees that the soul will go to heaven; but the Church does not want to compound the sorrow of the survivors by denying Christian burial if any valid excuse for it can be established.

**Discussion:** 1. What are the three steps in practicing the virtue of faith? 2. What is an apostate? 3. Why does an invalid marriage frequently lead to apostasy? 4. What is the difference between a lax Catholic and an apostate? 5. How does the Church show herself the loving Mother even of her wayward children?

A lax Catholic, then, is not necessarily an apostate Catholic. Very often however, laxity does lead to apostasy. A person cannot go on living with his back turned upon God month after month and year after year; a person cannot go on indefinitely living in mortal sin, continually rejecting God’s grace, without in the end finding that his faith is gone. Faith is a gift of God. There must come a time when God, who is infinitely just as well as infinitely merciful, will no longer allow His gift to be abused, His love flouted. With God’s supporting hand withdrawn, faith dies.



Besides laxity, another cause of apostasy is intellectual pride. This is a danger to which a person exposes himself when he wades beyond his intellectual and spiritual depth. There is, for example, the young man or young woman who attends a secular university and grows careless in the matter of prayer and Mass and the sacraments. At the same time his or her spiritual life is neglected the young person becomes dazzled by the lofty superiority of some professor who has a patronizing disdain for "outmoded superstitions" such as religion. Instead of accepting the challenge of the shallow irreligion that is thrown at him in the classroom and looking up the answers, the young student abandons the authority of God and God's Church for the authority of the instructor. This is not to say that all teachers in secular universities are atheists; far from it. But all too often there are some who, in their own insecurity, seek to bolster their ego by belittling greater minds than their own. Even one man like this can do irreparable harm to impressionable youngsters and can spread the contagion of his own intellectual pride.

Unwise reading can be another threat to faith. A person who himself is suffering from intellectual poverty may easily get caught in the quicksands of smart and sophisticated authors whose attitude towards religion is one of gentle amusement or lofty scorn. Reading such authors, the superficial mind is likely to begin questioning his own religious beliefs. Not having learned to weigh evidence and to think for himself — forgetting that "a fool can ask more questions in an hour than a wise man can answer in a year" — the unwary reader surrenders his faith to the sparkling sophistries and the profound absurdities which he reads.

Finally, apostasy may result from habitual sin. A person cannot continually live in conflict with himself. If his actions are at war with his beliefs, something has to give. If grace is neglected, it is likely to be faith rather than sin which goes out the window. Many who explain their loss of faith as due to intellectual difficulties are really trying to cover up a more basic and less noble conflict with their passions.

**Discussion:** 1. Why does religious laxity often lead to apostasy? 2. Why does a Catholic student at a secular university have special need for a solid spiritual life? 3. How does unwise reading become a threat to faith? 4. How does habitual sin so often lead to loss of faith?

Besides the complete rejection of the Catholic faith, which is the sin of apostasy, there also can be a partial rejection of one's faith, and this is the sin of heresy. One who commits the sin of heresy is called a heretic. A heretic is a baptized person who refuses to believe one or more of the truths revealed by God and taught by the Catholic Church. A truth revealed by God, and solemnly proclaimed as such by the Church, is termed a *dogma* of faith. The virgin conception of Jesus — the fact that He did not have a human father — is an example of a dogma of faith. The fact that the Holy Father, St. Peter's successor, is infallible when he officially teaches a doctrine of faith or morals to all Christendom also is a dogma. Another example is the fact that God created Mary's soul free from original sin — the dogma of the Immaculate Conception.

These are but a few of the dogmas which, interwoven with each other, make up the fabric of Christian faith. To reject one is, in substance, to reject all. If God, speaking through His Church, could be wrong on one point, there is no particular reason for believing God on any point. There is no such thing as being "slightly heretical" any more than there is any such thing as being "slightly dead." We sometimes feel that the members of the High Episcopalian church (or Anglo-Catholics) are very close to the Catholic Church because they believe almost everything which we believe and have ceremonies like our ceremonies of the Mass, have confessionals in their churches, and wear vestments and use incense. But in truth the phrase "almost a Catholic" is as meaningless as the phrase "almost alive."

It should be noted that in the sin of heresy, as in every sin, we have to distinguish between *material* sin and *formal* sin. If a person does something which is wrong, objectively — but a wrong of which the person, through no fault of his own, is unaware — then we say that the person has sinned materially

but not formally. In his wrong action there is no personal guilt. A Catholic who would reject a truth of faith, who would decide, for example, that he didn't want to believe in hell, would be guilty of the sin of heresy, both materially and formally. A Protestant, however, sincerely believing the teachings of the church in which he was raised and with no opportunity for knowing otherwise, would be a material heretic only; he would not be *formally* guilty of the sin of heresy.

**Discussion:** 1. What is the difference between apostasy and heresy? 2. What do we mean by a "dogma of faith"? 3. Give an example of a dogma of faith. 4. Why is there no such thing as being "slightly" heretical? 5. Explain the difference between *material* sin and *formal* sin. 6. Why is the heresy of many Protestants a material heresy only?

There is one form of heresy that is especially prevalent and especially dangerous. That is the error of *indifferentism*. Indifferentism holds that all religions are equally pleasing to God; one religion is as good as another, and it is just a matter of personal preference which religion you profess or whether you profess any religion at all. The basic error in indifferentism is the supposition that truth and error are equally pleasing to God; or else the error of assuming that there is no such thing as absolute truth; that truth is whatever you want to make it. If we suppose that one religion is as good as another, the next logical step is to conclude that no religion is really worth bothering about, since no religion can be divinely established and approved.

The heresy of indifferentism is particularly widespread in America, where we like to pride ourselves on our "broad-mindedness." So many people are fuzzy in their understanding of what democracy means. Democracy demands — indeed Christian charity demands — that we respect our neighbor's conscience and sincere convictions even when we know that he is wrong. But democracy does *not* demand that we pretend that the wrongness doesn't matter. Democracy does not demand that we put error on the same pedestal as truth. In short, the Catholic who bows

his head in agreement when someone says, "It doesn't matter what you believe; it's what you do that counts," is guilty of a sin against faith.

Indifferentism can be preached by actions as well as by words. That is why it is wrong for a Catholic to attend non-Catholic religious services, even though he may take no active part in such services. It is obvious that to participate *actively* in a non-Catholic religious service would be a grievous sin against the virtue of faith. We *know* how God wants to be worshiped and therefore it is gravely sinful for us to worship Him in ways that are fashioned by men rather than dictated by God.

But even though we take no active part, it still is wrong for us to attend non-Catholic religious services. By our very presence there we are silently proclaiming our acceptance of the heresy that one religion is as good as another; we are giving scandal to all who recognize us as a Catholic. The only time that we may attend non-Catholic religious services without sin (provided we take no active part) is when there is a sufficiently grave reason. Charity, for example, would justify our attendance at the funeral or wedding of a non-Catholic relative or close friend or business associate. In such cases everyone knows why we are there and there is no danger of giving scandal.

Sometimes our fellow citizens find it hard to understand this firm attitude which we Catholics take in the matter of non-participation. Several Protestant ministers may join together for an interdenominational service on some special occasion; and they are likely to consider the local Catholic priest as unduly narrow-minded because he will take no part in it. A non-Catholic neighbor may say, "I went to midnight Mass with you on Christmas; why can't you come to our Harvest Service with me?" — and will be rather resentful of the Catholic's "intolerance." It is not easy to explain our position to such critics, to make them see how supremely logical is our attitude. If one possesses religious truth, he may not in conscience compromise with religious fallacy. Tolerance is something which we show towards *persons*, not towards the person's errors, however honestly those errors may be held.

**Discussion:** 1. What does indifferentism hold with regard to religion? 2. If we accept indifferentism, what is the next logical step? 3. Why is the heresy of indifferentism so widespread in America? 4. Why is it wrong for a Catholic to participate actively in non-Catholic religious services? 5. Why is it wrong to attend non-Catholic religious services even if we do not actively participate? 6. When might we be justified in attending non-Catholic religious services? 7. What is the true meaning of tolerance?

**MY APOSTOLATE:**

1. If I have a lax or fallen-away Catholic friend or neighbor, I shall pray for him (or her) and invite him to go to church with me.
2. If I have children of reading age, I shall carefully supervise their reading and explain to them the dangers that lie in unwise reading.
3. If I have a child who is thinking of college, I shall persuade him (or her) to choose a Catholic college or university, explaining the importance of such a choice.

## SACRILEGE AND SUPERSTITION

**F**AITH is not easily lost. If we cherish and cultivate the gift of faith which God has given us, we shall not become apostates or heretics. To cherish and to cultivate it means, among other things, to make frequent acts of faith; an act of faith being simply a grateful avowal to God of the fact that we do believe in Him and in all that He has revealed. An act of faith should be one of our daily prayers.

To cherish and cultivate our faith also means that we never stop trying to learn more about our faith. So that we may have a better understanding of what it is that we believe, we shall be attentive to sermons and instructions and read Catholic periodicals and books that will enlarge our knowledge of the faith. When opportunity offers, we shall take part in religious discussion clubs.

To cherish and cultivate our faith means above all that we shall *live* our faith, that we shall lead a good life in accord with the principles which we profess. An act of faith becomes a jumble of meaningless words on the lips of one whose daily actions shout: "There is no God; or, if there is, I don't care what He wants."

And of course, on the negative side, the cherishing and cultivating of our faith requires that we avoid the company of persons who might pose a threat to our faith. It is not so much the outright anti-Catholic whom we have to fear here, with his bitter attacks upon the faith. It is rather the polished and urbane unbeliever, with his friendly condescension for our "naïve" beliefs and his smiling innuendoes, who is our greater danger. We do so hate to be thought unmodern, we do shrink from being laughed at.

Our concern for our faith also will steer us away from any type of literature which might imperil our faith. However highly

praised by the critics a book may be, however sophisticated a magazine may seem — if they are opposed to what we as Catholics believe, then they are not for us. And it will be not only the Index of Prohibited Books which will guide us in our reading. Our own well-formed conscience will warn us away from many publications which may never reach the eyes of the Church's official censors.

**Discussion:** 1. How can we guard against becoming apostates or heretics? 2. What is an act of faith? 3. In what ways may we come to a better understanding of our faith? 4. What does it mean to *live* our faith? 5. What type of unbeliever is the greatest danger to our faith? 6. Besides the Index of Prohibited Books, what other guide do we have in choosing our reading?

Some so-called intellectuals resent this restriction which we Catholics place upon our reading. "What are you afraid of?" they will ask. "Are you afraid you'll find out that you're wrong? You shouldn't be so narrow-minded. You should be willing to listen to both sides of the question. If your faith is any good, you should be able to read anything without coming to harm."

Our answer is that, quite honestly, we *are* afraid. We are afraid not of finding out that we are wrong but of finding out, too late, that we are weak. Original sin has dimmed our reason and weakened our will. Faith requires no small degree of sacrifice. What God wants is so often not what we want, humanly speaking. The little devil of self-love tells us that life could be so much easier if we didn't believe. Yes, quite honestly we *are* afraid that some clever writer may succeed in inflating our ego to the point where, like Adam, we shall decide to be our own god. And, whether the censorship be that of the Church or that of our own conscience, we do not deem it a denial of our liberty. The refusal of poison to the mind is no more a frustration of liberty than is denial of poison to the stomach. We do not have to drink carbolic acid in order to prove that we have a good digestion.

Assuming, then, that our faith is a strong, living, and well cared-for faith, there is not much danger that we shall fall into another sin against the first commandment stemming from lack of faith: the sin of sacrilege. A person sins by sacrilege when he mistreats sacred persons, places, or things. In its slighter manifestations, sacrilege is due to a lack of reverence for that which belongs to God. At its worst, sacrilege is due to hatred for God and for all that belongs to God. In our own day the Communists give us heartbreaking examples of sacrilege at its worst, as they stable horses in churches, imprison and torture priests and nuns, and trample the Holy Eucharist underfoot. These examples, incidentally, typify the three classes of sacrilege which theologians distinguish. The mistreatment of a *person* consecrated to God in the clerical or the religious state is called a *personal* sacrilege. To profane or defile a *place* of divine worship which has been publicly dedicated to God by the Church is called a *local* sacrilege — from the Latin word “locus,” meaning “place.” To misuse sacred *things*, such as the sacraments, the Bible, the vessels of the altar — anything, in short, which has been blessed or consecrated for use in divine worship or for religious devotion — would be a *real* sacrilege: from the Latin word “realis,” meaning “pertaining to things.”

An act of sacrilege, if it were fully deliberate and involved a serious matter, such as receiving a sacrament unworthily, would be a mortal sin. For example, making a bad confession or receiving Holy Communion in the state of mortal sin would be a sacrilege of a grievous nature. Such a sacrilege might, however, be a venial sin if it were committed without full realization or without full consent of the will. A sacrilege might also be a venial sin because of the slightness of the irreverence involved, as in the case of a layman picking up a consecrated chalice out of curiosity.

However, if ours is a healthy faith, there is little likelihood that the sin of sacrilege will be any problem for us. For the majority of us, the most pertinent point will be the need to show due reverence for religious articles and holy things which we personally use. There is the matter of keeping the holy water in a clean container and in a decent place; handling the Bible



with reverence and giving it a position of honor in the home; burning our soiled scapulars and broken rosaries, rather than throwing them in the trash; overlooking the human infirmities of priests or religious whom we may dislike and speaking of them with respect because of the God-ownership that we see in them; conducting ourselves with reverence in church, particularly at baptisms and weddings, when hilarity may tend to make us forgetful. Reverence such as this is the outer garment of our faith.

**Discussion:** 1. What objection is sometimes voiced to the restriction which Catholics place upon their reading? 2. What is our answer to the charge that we are afraid to read certain types of books? 3. Why is our rejection of harmful books not a denial of liberty? 4. What is the sin of *sacrilege*? 5. Explain the three kinds of sacrilege. 6. When is a sacrilege a mortal sin? 7. What are some of the ways in which good Catholics show reverence for holy things and persons?

Do you carry a "lucky piece" in your pocket or pocketbook? Are you tempted to knock on wood if you tell someone how healthy you have been or how good your business has been doing? Do you feel a little uneasy if you have to sit at table with twelve other persons? If a black cat runs across the street in front of your car, do you drive a little more carefully afterwards? If you can answer "no" to all these questions and have never succumbed to any other popular superstition, then indeed you are a well-balanced person—your faith and your reason are in firm control of your emotions.

Superstition is a sin against the first commandment. It is a sin against the first commandment because it gives credit to some created thing or to a human person for powers that belong only to God. Honor that should go to God goes instead to one of God's creatures.

For example, everything good that comes to us comes from God; it does not come from a rabbit's foot or a horseshoe. And nothing bad happens to us unless God permits it to happen, and God does not permit it to happen unless in some way it will work

to our ultimate good; no spilled salt or broken mirror or number thirteen is going to bring trouble upon our heads. God does not fall asleep and let the devil have a field day with us.

Similarly, no one but God knows the contingent future absolutely, with no ifs or buts. We all can make educated guesses about the future. We know what time we are going to get up tomorrow (if we don't forget to set the alarm); we know what we are going to do next Sunday (if nothing unforeseen occurs); astronomers can tell us what time the sun will rise and set on February 15, 1987 (if the world has not yet ended). But only God can know the future with absolute certainty — both those events which depend upon His own eternal decrees and those which depend upon the free choice of other human wills.

That is why it is a sin against the first commandment — a dishonoring of God — to believe in fortunetellers or spiritist mediums. Fortunetellers, combining psychology with the law of averages — and perhaps a bit of chicanery, can mislead some very smart people. Spiritist mediums, combining their own abnormality (self-induced hysteria) with human suggestibility and very often with outright fraud, can stage séances that will thrill even the supposedly sophisticated. The question as to whether some fortunetellers and some mediums may not be in league with the devil is a disputed point that never has been satisfactorily settled. The great Houdini claimed that there was no séance that he could not reproduce by natural means — by trickery — and he proved his claim in a score of cases.

Superstition is, by its nature, a mortal sin. In practice, however, many sins of superstition are venial, because the act is not fully deliberate. This holds true particularly of the many popular superstitions with which our materialistic culture abounds: unlucky days and lucky numbers and knocking on wood and all the rest. It definitely is a greivous matter, however, and a mortal sin to believe in the supernatural powers of fortunetellers or mediums. Even if we do not believe in them, it is a sin to consult such people professionally. Even though we do so only out of curiosity, we are giving bad example and co-operating in their sin. Telling one another's fortunes with cards or tea leaves

at a party, where everyone knows that it is a game for amusement only and not to be taken seriously, would not be a sin. This is quite a different matter from consulting professional fortune-tellers.

**Discussion:** 1. How is *superstition* a sin against the first commandment? 2. Why cannot good-luck and bad-luck charms or events be given credit for what happens to us? 3. What is the difference between our knowledge of the future and God's? 4. When is the sin of superstition a venial sin? 5. What kind of a sin is it to believe in fortunetellers and mediums?

Sometimes our non-Catholic friends suspect us of sinning against the first commandment because of the honor we pay to the saints. This accusation would be true if we paid to the saints the divine worship that is due to God alone. But we do not, not if we are in our right minds. Even the honor which we pay to Mary, the Blessed Mother of God, surpassing though it does the reverence we pay to the angels and the other canonized saints, is still of an entirely different nature from the adoration which we give, and *may* give, only to God.

When we pray to our Blessed Mother and to the saints in heaven (as we should) and beg their help, we know that whatever they may do for us will not be done of their own power, as though they were divine. Whatever they may do for us will be done for us by God, through their intercession. If we value the prayers of our friends here upon earth and feel that their prayers will help us, then surely we have the right to feel that the prayers of our friends in heaven will be even more powerful. The saints are God's chosen friends, heroes in the spiritual combat. It pleases God to encourage our imitation of them and to show His own love for them by dispensing His graces through their hands. Nor does the honor we show to the saints detract one whit from the honor that is due to God. The saints are God's masterpieces of grace. When we praise them, it is God — who made them what they are — whom we honor most. The

highest honor that can be paid to an artist is to praise the work of his hands.

We honor the statues and the pictures of the saints, yes; and we venerate their relics. But we are not *adoring* these representations and relics. No more so than a hardheaded business man is adoring the picture of his sainted mother before which he places a fresh flower every morning, or the lock of whose hair he carries reverently in his wallet. And when we pray before the crucifix or the image of a saint, in order to better fix our mind upon what we are doing, we are not so stupid (let us hope) as to suppose that the plaster or wooden image has in itself any power to help us. That *would* be a sin against the first commandment, which forbids the making of images in order to adore them. But we do not, of course, adore them.

**Discussion:** 1. When would the honor we pay to the saints become a sin of superstition? 2. Why should we feel that the prayers of the saints will help us? 3. Why does not the honor we give to the saints detract from the honor due to God? 4. To what everyday practices may we compare the honor which we give to statues and relics of the saints? 5. Why do we pray before a crucifix or an image of a saint?

#### MY APOSTOLATE:

1. I shall subscribe to at least one Catholic weekly newspaper and at least one Catholic magazine which will help me to better know my faith.
2. Knowing that superstitions are absorbed at home, I shall be careful, if a parent, not to speak of good-luck or bad-luck superstitions even in jest.
3. I shall show my reverence for holy things by wearing a scapular or scapular medal, by having a holy-water font (filled) in every bedroom, by having a crucifix in a place of honor in my home.

### HOPE AND LOVE

“MY DADDY will fix it. He can do anything.” “I’ll ask my Daddy; he knows everything.” Every parent finds himself, or herself, deeply touched at times by the child’s absolute confidence in the limitless power and knowledge of Daddy and Mommy. Indeed, it is a confidence that sometimes can prove embarrassing when Daddy or Mommy finds it hard to deliver according to expectations. But it would be a strange sort of parent who would not feel an inner thrill of pleasure at such manifest acts of unquestioning trust on the part of his children.

It is easy to see, then, why an act of hope in God is also an act of worship. An act of hope is an expression of our complete trust in God as an all-wise, all-powerful, and all-loving Father. Whether our act of hope be an interior one, limited to a movement of the heart and mind, or whether it be externalized in the form of verbal prayer, in either case we are praising the infinite power and fidelity and mercy of God. We are performing an act of true worship. We are fulfilling one of our duties under the first commandment.

When we make an act of hope we are asserting our conviction in the fact that God loves us so much that He has bound Himself by solemn covenant to bring us safely to heaven (“...relying on Thy almighty power and infinite mercy and promises”). We are asserting, too, our conviction of the fact that God’s mercy is so boundless that it will even outwit our human weakness and waywardness (“I hope to obtain pardon of my sins, the help of Thy grace, and life everlasting”). There is just one condition to all this. It is a condition presupposed and taken for granted, even though not expressed vocally in a formal act of faith: “provided that I, for my part, do my reasonable best.” Not my *absolute* best, necessarily. Few, if

any, ever do their *absolute* best. But at least my reasonable best.

In other words, when I make an act of hope, I am reminding myself and acknowledging to God that I shall not lose heaven except through my own fault. If I go to hell it will not be because of any "bad breaks"; it will not be by accident; it will not be through any failure of God's. If I lose my soul, it will be because I have chosen to go my way rather than God's way. If I find myself separated from God for all eternity, it will be because I have deliberately separated myself from God here and now, with my eyes wide open.

**Discussion:** 1. Why is an act of hope in God also an act of worship? 2. When we make an act of hope in what fact are we asserting our conviction? 3. In our act of hope what condition is presupposed? 4. Of what am I reminding myself when I make an act of hope? 5. If I lose my soul, what will be the reason?

With this understanding of the act of hope, it is easy for us to detect what the sins against hope will be. We may sin against hope by forgetting the "silent clause" in the act of hope: by expecting God to do *everything*, instead of *almost* everything. God will give to every one of us all the grace we need to get to heaven, but He expects us to co-operate with His grace. Just as a loving parent will provide his children with food and clothing and shelter and medical care, and yet will expect the children at least to fork the food into their own mouths and to swallow, to put on the clothes provided, to come into the house out of the rain, and to stay away from dangerous places like deep ditches and blazing fires; so also does God expect us to use each grace which He gives and to stay away from unnecessary danger.

If we do *not* do our part, if we blandly assume that because God wants us in heaven then it is up to Him to get us there regardless of what we may do, then we are guilty of the sin of *presumption*, one of the two sins against the virtue of hope.

Here are some simple illustrations of the sin of presumption. A man knows that every time he stops at a certain bar he ends up by getting drunk; the place is an occasion of sin to him, and he knows that he should stay away. But passing by the bar, he says to himself, "I'll just drop in to chin with the boys for a few minutes and maybe have one drink. I'll not get drunk this time." But by the very fact that he willingly returns to this unnecessary occasion of sin, he is trying to extort from God grace to which he has no right. He is not doing his part. Even though it may happen that this time he *doesn't* get drunk, he still has been guilty of the sin of presumption by exposing himself needlessly to danger. Another example would be that of a girl who knows that almost every time she goes out with a certain boy, she commits sin. But she says, "Well, I'll go out with him again tonight, but this time I'll make him behave himself." Again, unnecessary danger; again, the sin of presumption. A final example might be the person who, troubled by strong temptations, knows that he should pray more and should receive the sacraments more frequently, since these are precisely the helps God offers us for the conquest of temptation. But the person sinfully neglects his prayers and is very irregular in receiving the sacraments. Again it is the sin of presumption — we might call it presumption by default.

Besides presumption, there is another sin against the virtue of hope: the sin of despair. It is the very opposite of presumption. Where presumption expects too much of God, despair expects too little. The classic example of the sin of despair is the man who says: "I've been too big a sinner all my life to expect God to forgive me now. God couldn't forgive the likes of me. It's no use asking Him." The gravity of the sin of despair lies in the insult which it offers to the infinite mercy and inexhaustible love of God. Judas Iscariot, swinging at the end of a rope, is the perfect type of the despairing sinner: the man with remorse but without contrition.

For most of us, genuine despair is a remote danger. We are more likely to sin by presumption than by despair. But every time we commit a sin to avoid some real or fancied danger —

whether it is telling a lie to avoid embarrassment or using contraceptives to avoid having a child — there is some degree of lack of hope involved. We aren't quite fully convinced that, if we do what is right, we can trust God to take care of the consequences.

**Discussion:** 1. When are we guilty of the sin of presumption? 2. Why is it a sin of presumption to put ourselves in an unnecessary occasion of sin? 3. When would it be a sin of presumption to be careless about praying and receiving the sacraments? 4. What is the sin of despair? 5. In what does the gravity of the sin of despair lie? 6. If we commit a sin to avoid some danger, how does our sin show lack of hope?

We honor God by our faith in Him. We honor God by our hope in Him. But most of all do we worship God by our love for Him. We make an act of love every time that we give expression — either internally in mind and heart, or externally by words or actions — to the fact that we do love God above everybody and everything else for His own sake.

“For His own sake” are key words. True charity, or love for God, is not motivated by what God has done for us, nor by what God is going to do for us. In true charity we love God solely — or at least mainly — because He is so good and so infinitely lovable in Himself. Genuine love for God is not a mercenary, self-seeking love, no more than is the love of a child for his parents.

It is true that a child owes much to his parents and hopes for much from his parents. But true filial love goes far beyond these selfish motives. A normal child still will love his parents even if they have lost all their possessions and can do nothing, materially speaking, for the child. So too does our love for God rise above His benefits and His mercies (although these may be a starting point) and fasten upon the infinite loveliness of God Himself.

It bears noting that love for God resides primarily in the will and not in the emotions. Quite conceivably a person might feel perfectly cold towards God on a purely emotional level and



yet might have a very strong love for God. It is the fixing of the *will* upon God that constitutes true love for Him. If habitually we have the desire to do all that God wants us to do (simply because He wants it) and the determination to avoid all that He does not want us to do (simply because He does not want it), then we have love for God, regardless of how we *feel*.

If we love God rightly and truly, it follows, of course, that we love all those whom He loves. That means we love every soul whom God has created and for whom Christ has died, barring only the souls in hell.

Since we love our neighbor (meaning everyone) for the sake of God, it does not particularly matter to us whether our neighbor is *naturally* lovable or not. It helps a lot, of course, if our neighbor is naturally lovable; but then there is less merit in our love. However, whether he be handsome or ugly, mean or kind, pleasant or repulsive — our love for God makes us want to see *everyone* get to heaven, since that is what God wants. And we'll do all that we reasonably can to help our neighbor get there.

It plainly can be seen that supernatural love for our neighbor does not reside in the emotions, any more than does love for God. On a natural level we might feel quite a strong distaste for some particular person and yet have a truly supernatural love for him. Our supernatural love, or charity, would be evidenced by our desire for his welfare, by our desire especially for his eternal salvation, by our willingness to pray for him, by our forgiveness of any injuries he may have inflicted upon us, by our refusal to entertain bitter and vengeful thoughts concerning him.

No one likes to be cheated or double-crossed or lied about, and God does not expect us to enjoy being abused. But God does expect us to follow His own example and to will the salvation of the sinner, even while we are smarting from the impact of his sins.

**Discussion:** 1. How do we make an act of love? 2. In true charity, what is the reason for our love for God? 3. How is true love for God like a child's true love for his parents? 4. What do we mean by saying that love for God resides

in the *will*? 5. If we love God rightly, whom else must we love? 6. Why must we want to see everyone get to heaven? 7. What are some of the ways in which our love for our neighbor is evidenced? 8. What does God expect of us with regard to a neighbor who may have hurt us?

What, then, are the principal sins against charity? One sin would be to fail to make an *act* of charity, knowingly, when it is our duty to do so. Our duty to make an act of charity arises, in the first instance, when we become aware of our obligation to love God for His own sake, and our neighbor for love of God. We also have the duty to make an act of charity in those temptations which can be overcome only by an act of charity — for example, in a temptation to hatred. We are obliged, too, to make an act of love often during life (this is part of our duty to worship God) and above all in the hour of our death, as we prepare to meet God face to face.

Turning to some specific sins against charity, we shall consider first of all the sin of hatred. Hatred, as we have seen, is not the same thing as personal dislike. It is not the same thing as feeling pain because we have been betrayed or otherwise injured. Hatred is a spirit of bitterness, of unforgiveness. Hatred is a desire to see harm befall another. Hatred is a feeling of joy at another's misfortune.

The worst kind of hatred is, obviously, hatred of God: a desire (absurd, of course) to see God come to harm, an eagerness to see God's will flouted, an unholy glee in seeing sins committed because they are an insult to God. The devils and the souls in hell hate God, but it is not a sin that men on earth commonly commit; fortunately so, since hatred of God is the worst sin that can be committed against Him. It is to be suspected, however, that some professed atheists are really haters of God rather than disbelievers in Him.

Hatred of neighbor is a far more common sin. This is the desire to see harm come to another and a feeling of pleasure at whatever harm may befall him. If we were to wish our neighbor *serious* harm, such as sickness or loss of job, then our sin would be a mortal sin. To wish him a slight evil, such as

that he may miss his bus or get a tongue-lashing from his wife, would be a venial sin. It is not a sin, however, to wish a lesser evil for the sake of a greater good. We might rightly wish our drunken neighbor to have a bad hangover so that he may stop drinking. We might wish the lawbreaker to be caught so that he may stop his crimes. We might wish the tyrant to die so that his people may know peace. Always provided, however, that we still desire the person's spiritual good and eternal salvation.

Envy is another sin against charity. This consists of resentment of our neighbor's good fortune, as though it were in some way a robbery of ourselves. Even more serious is the sin of scandal, whereby we, by our word or example, give occasion to another person to commit sin or put him in danger of sinning, even if no sin actually follows. This is sin that parents, as patterns for their children, must especially guard against.

Finally, there is the sin of sloth, a sin against the supernatural love we owe ourselves. Sloth is a spiritual laziness by which we disesteem spiritual things (such as prayer and the sacraments) because of the effort involved.

**Discussion:** 1. At what times are we obliged to make an act of love? 2. What is the difference between dislike and hatred? 3. How does hatred for God show itself? 4. When is hatred a mortal sin? 5. When is it not a sin to wish harm to someone? 6. What is the sin of envy? 7. Against what sin must parents (and other adults) be especially on their guard? 8. What is the sin of sloth?

#### MY APOSTOLATE:

1. I shall make an act of hope as a regular part of my morning and night prayers.
2. As I make an act of love in my daily prayers I shall offer it for the salvation of all who have ever in any way hurt me.
3. If a parent, I shall each evening examine my conscience as to the good or bad example I have given during the past day.

### HOLY IS HIS NAME

“WHAT’S in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.” These famous words of Shakespeare are only half true. A name, whether it be of a person or of a thing, gathers many emotional overtones by constant use. A name ceases to be just a group of letters taken from the alphabet; a name comes to represent the person or thing which bears the name. The emotions aroused in us by the word “rose” are quite different from those evoked by the name “skunk cabbage.” A young man in love only has to hear his sweetheart’s name mentioned, even casually by a stranger, to make his pulse rate rise. A man who has suffered great injury at the hands of someone named George will forever have a distaste for the name “George.” Men have killed — and been killed — “in defense of their good name.” Whole families have been grieved because some member of the family “brought disgrace on the family name.” In short, a name stands for the one who bears the name — and our attitude towards a name reflects our attitude towards the person whose name it is.

All this is obvious, of course. But it serves to recall to mind why it is a sin to misuse God’s name — to use it carelessly or irreverently. If we love God we shall love His name and never speak it except with reverence and respect. We shall never use it as an expletive, as an expression of anger or impatience or surprise; we shall do nothing to bring infamy upon His name. Indeed, our love for God’s name will extend to those of Mary, His Mother, and to His friends the saints, and to all holy things which belong to God. Their names, too, will pass our lips only with thoughtful reverence. That we may never forget this aspect of our love for God, He has given us the second commandment: “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.”

There are many ways in which we may fail in this duty of reverence for God's name. The most common failure is the sin of simple profanity — the use of the Holy Name simply to relieve our feelings. "My God, no!"; "By Jesus Christ, I'll show him!"; "For Christ's sake, stop making that noise!" Seldom a day passes, as we go about our activities, that we do not hear these and similar phrases. Sometimes, indeed, there is not even the excuse of emotion; we encounter persons who scatter God's name throughout their conversation as casually as you or I might mention apples or onions. Always, of course, they testify to a lack or shallowness in their love for God.

Usually this type of "simple profanity" is a venial sin, because there is no deliberate intent to dishonor God or to show contempt for His name. Such an intent would make the sin a grievous one — but ordinarily such language is the result of thoughtlessness and carelessness rather than malice. This type of profanity might become a mortal sin, however, if it were the occasion of grave scandal: for example, if a parent by his profanity weakened respect for God's name in his children.

**Discussion:** 1. Give some examples to show that a name is more than a mere collection of letters of the alphabet. 2. If we love God, what will be our attitude towards His holy name? 3. What is the second commandment? 4. What is the most common failure in the use of God's name? 5. To what do they testify who use God's name carelessly? 6. Under what circumstances might simple profanity be a mortal sin?

The profanity of which we have been speaking is what many people — mistakenly — call "swearing." Actually swearing is something quite different. It would be an error for a person to say in confession "I swore," when what he really means is that he used profanity.

To swear means to take an oath, to call upon God to be the witness that what we say is true. If I say "For Christ's sake!," I am using profanity; if I say "I am telling the truth, so help me God!," I am swearing. It is quite evident that swearing is not necessarily a sin at all. On the contrary, an oath reverently taken

is an act of worship pleasing to God, provided three conditions are fulfilled.

First of all, there must be a good reason for taking an oath. God is not to be invoked lightly as our witness. Sometimes it is necessary for us to take an oath; for example, if we are a witness in a court of law or are being inducted into an office where we must swear to uphold the constitution. Sometimes, too, the Church calls upon us to take an oath, as when godparents swear to the baptism of a person whose baptismal record cannot be found. At other times we may not *have* to take an oath, but some good purpose may be served by guaranteeing, with an oath, the truth of what we say — as when God's honor or our neighbor's welfare or our own may be at stake. To take an oath when there is no need or reason for it, to interlard our conversation with such phrases as, "May God strike me dead if it isn't true," "As God sees me, I swear it is true," and similar phrases, is a sin. Usually the sin is venial if we are speaking the truth because, as with profanity, it is done in thoughtlessness rather than in malice.

It could be a mortal sin, however, if what we say is not true and we know it is not true. This is the second requirement for a lawful oath: that, having taken an oath, we be scrupulous in speaking the truth as we know it. It is a serious dishonor that we do to God if we make Him the witness to a lie. This is the sin of perjury, and deliberate perjury always is a mortal sin.

For an oath to be good and meritorious and an act of honor to God, there is a third requirement when the oath is what we call a *promissory* oath. If we bind ourselves by oath to do something, we must be sure that the action we promise is a good and useful thing and possible to do. If a man were to take an oath, for example, to get even with his neighbor, it is plain that such an oath would be wrong to take and wrong to keep. One is obliged *not* to keep an oath like that. But if my promissory oath is a good one, then I must be sure to intend sincerely to do what I have sworn to do. Circumstances might arise, admittedly, which would end the binding power of the oath. For example, an older son who swore to his dying parent

to look after his younger brother would be released from his oath if the parent recovered (the reason for making the oath ceases to exist); or if the older brother himself became ill and needy (the condition under which the oath was given, the older brother's ability, ceases); or the younger brother grows up and becomes self-supporting (the object of the promise changes substantially). Other factors which might cause a promissory oath to lose its binding force would be release from the obligation by the one to whom the promise was made; the discovery that the object of the oath (the thing to be done) would be useless or even sinful; or the annulment of the oath (or dispensation from it) by competent authority, such as one's confessor.

**Discussion:** 1. With what other sin do people sometimes confuse profanity? 2. What is meant by swearing? 3. For an oath to be pleasing to God, what is the first condition necessary? 4. What kind of sin is it to swear without need? 5. What is the second requirement for a lawful oath? 6. What is the sin of perjury? 7. When an oath is a *promissory* oath, what third condition must be fulfilled? 8. What are some factors which might release us from an oath?

What is the difference between an oath and a vow? When we take an oath, we call upon God to be witness to the fact that we are speaking the truth as we know it. If we are swearing to a simple statement of fact, we call that an assertory oath. If we are swearing that we shall do something for someone in the future, we call that a *promissory* oath. In either case, we simply ask God, the Lord of Truth, to be witness to our truthfulness and our purpose of fidelity. We are not promising God anything, for Himself.

If we take a vow, however, we do promise God something. We promise God, with the intention of binding ourselves under pain of sin, to do something especially pleasing to God. In this case God is not merely our witness; He also is the recipient of whatever it is we intend to do.

A vow may be either a *private* vow or a *public* vow. For example, a person might privately make a vow to visit the shrine

of St. Anne in Quebec in gratitude for recovery from an illness; a single person living in the world might privately make a vow of chastity. In reference to private vows, it should be pointed out that such a vow should not be made lightly. A vow binds under pain of sin, or it is not a vow at all. Whether the violation of the vow would be a mortal sin or a venial sin depends, in a private vow, on the intention of the one who makes it and on the importance of the matter involved. (One cannot bind himself to something of slight importance under penalty of grave sin.) But even if a person intended to bind himself only under pain of venial sin, the obligation is too serious to be entered into lightly. No one should take a private vow without first consulting his confessor.

A public vow is one which is made to an official representative of the Church, such as a bishop or a religious superior, and is accepted by the superior in the name of the Church. The public vows most familiar to us are those which bind a person to the complete observance of the Evangelical Counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience in a religious community. Any person who makes these three vows publicly is said to have "entered religion," to have embraced the religious state. If the person is a woman, she has become a Sister. If the person is a man, he has become a Brother; or, if he receives the sacrament of Holy Orders in addition to making the three vows, he is called a religious priest.

**Discussion:** 1. What is the difference between an oath and a vow? 2. If a private vow is broken, what determines the seriousness of the sin? 3. Why is it advisable to consult one's confessor before making a private vow? 4. What is a public vow? 5. Which are the three public vows most familiar to us? 6. What does "entering religion" mean? 7. What is a man called who makes the three vows and also becomes a priest?

This is a point on which not even Catholics are always clear — the difference between a Brother and a priest. There are many splendid young men who feel the generous desire to



devote their lives to the service of God and of souls and yet do not feel that they are called to the priesthood. Such young men may do one of two things; they may enter one of the religious Orders or Societies which is made up of both Brothers and priests — such as the Franciscans, the Passionists, the Jesuits. Here the young man in question would make his religious novitiate and take the three vows of religion; but he would not study theology, he would not receive Holy Orders. He would spend his life in devoted service as a helper to the priests; perhaps as a secretary, or a cook, or a librarian. He would be what is called an auxiliary Brother. Every religious Order that I know of is in urgent need of such Brothers; every auxiliary Brother releases another priest for work that only a priest can do.

Or the young man who feels called to the religious life but not to the priesthood might prefer to join one of the religious Societies which is made up entirely of Brothers — such as the Christian Brothers, the Xaverian Brothers, the Alexian Brothers. These Societies of dedicated religious men conduct schools, colleges, hospitals — any number of works of mercy. The members make a religious novitiate, they profess the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience; but they do not attend a theological seminary, they do not receive the sacrament of Holy Orders. They are Brothers, not priests. And there are never enough of them; never enough hands for the work that needs doing.

Another distinction that sometimes is confusing to people is that between religious priests and secular priests. It hardly needs remarking that this does *not* mean that some priests are religious and others are irreligious. It means that some men have felt themselves called not only to the religious life but also to the priesthood. They have entered a religious Order, such as the Benedictines, the Dominicans, the Redemptorists; they have made a religious novitiate and have pronounced the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Then, after becoming religious, they have gone on to study theology and have received the sacrament of Holy Orders. They are called *religious* priests because they have embraced the religious life and live as members of a religious Order.

Some young men, on the other hand, feel themselves called by God to the priesthood but not to the religious life, not to life in a religious Order. Such a young man states his desire to the bishop of his diocese. If the young man has the necessary qualifications, the bishop sends him to the seminary; first, a college course, then theology. In due time, if the young man perseveres and gives proof of his fitness, he receives the sacrament of Holy Orders; he is a priest. He is called a *secular* priest (from the Latin word "saeculum," meaning "world") because he lives not in a religious community but in the world, in the midst of the people to whom he ministers. He also is called a *diocesan* priest because he belongs to a diocese, not to a religious Order. His "boss" is the bishop of the diocese, not the superior of a religious community. At the time of his ordination, he promised obedience to his bishop. Normally, so long as he lives, his work will be within the limits of his own diocese. And he has but one vow, the vow of perpetual chastity, which he made when he was ordained a subdeacon — his first major step towards the altar.

**Discussion:** 1. What is the difference between a Brother and a priest? 2. What is an "auxiliary" Brother? 3. Why are some priests called "religious" priests? 4. Why are some priests called "secular" priests? 5. Why are secular priests also called "diocesan" priests?

#### MY APOSTOLATE:

1. Whenever I hear someone using profanity, I shall make reparation by saying silently to myself, "Blessed be God. Blessed be His Holy Name!"
2. If I am a single person, I shall give some thought and prayer to the question of whether or not God may be calling me to the priesthood or religious life.
3. I shall make it a permanent intention, in all my prayers and Masses, that more young men and women may hear God's voice and offer themselves for the doing of God's work in the priesthood or religious life.

## CHAPTER IX

## "BLESS AND DO NOT CURSE"

"BLESS those who persecute you; bless and do not curse," says St. Paul in his epistle to the Romans (12:14). To curse means to wish evil upon some person or place or thing. A form of curse that frequently is heard upon the lips of those who have little regard for the honor of God's name is "God damn you!" The meaning of these words is "May God send you to hell!" It is easy to see why such a curse would be a mortal sin, if a person spoke the words deliberately and really meant what he said. To ask God to send to hell a soul whom He has created, a soul for whom He died, is a most serious act of dishonor towards our infinitely merciful Father. It also would be a grievous sin against charity. Charity binds us to wish for, and to pray for the *salvation* of all souls — not for their eternal condemnation.

Usually such a curse is uttered in anger or impatience rather than with cold-blooded intent; the person does not really mean what he says. In such a case the curse would not be a mortal sin — although the anger might be. This is a point to bear in mind with regard to other misuses of God's name, also: the fact that very often it is the hatred, or the anger, or the impatience which is the real sin, rather than what we say. In going to confession, it would be more correct to say, "I was angry, and in my anger I cursed another," or "in my anger I used profanity," — rather than to confess simply, "I cursed" or "I used profane language."

There are, of course, other forms of cursing besides the common one mentioned above. *Any time* I wish evil to another, I am guilty of cursing. "I hope that he breaks his neck." "If he never gets well, it will be too soon to suit me." "May the devil take him and the likes of him." In these and similar

phrases (usually uttered without full deliberation) charity is wounded and God is dishonored.

The general principle is that if the harm we wish another is a grave harm, and we mean what we say, and the evil we wish is great, then the curse is a mortal sin. If it is only a small evil that we wish ("I hope his golf ball goes in the sand trap"; "I hope she gets caught in the rain with her new hair-do"), then the sin is venial. And, as already mentioned, even a grave evil wished upon someone might be a venial sin because of the thoughtlessness with which it was voiced.

Remembering that *everything* that God has made is dear to God, we can understand that it dishonors God to curse *any* of His creatures, not only human beings. However, animals and inanimate things are of incomparably less value than an immortal soul. Thus, the race-fan who says, "I hope that horse drops dead," and the "do-it-yourselfer" who says, "God damn that leaky faucet," are not guilty of mortal sin.

**Discussion:** 1. What is meant by cursing? 2. Why is it a grievous sin to curse another, deliberately? 3. When might cursing be a venial sin? 4. What should we bear in mind when we confess to misusing God's name? 5. What is the general principle to bear in mind when judging as to the seriousness of the sin of cursing? 6. Why is it displeasing to God to curse any of His creatures?

It might be useful, at this point, to remind parents of the importance of forming right consciences in their children in the matter of bad language as well as in other matters. Not all so-called bad language is a sin, and children should not be told that it is a sin if it is not. For example, the words "hell" and "damn" are not in themselves sinful words. The man who says, "Dammit, I forgot to mail that letter," the woman who says, "Oh, hell, another cup broken," may be using language that is ungentlemanly or unladylike — but not language that is sinful.

This is true also of the four-letter Anglo-Saxon words which frequently are used (instead of the more respectable Latin

derivatives) to describe bodily parts and processes. The four-letter words for urine and for excrement, for example, are coarse words, vulgar words, but they are not sinful words.

When a child comes in from play with a newly learned word such as these upon his lips, parents would make a great mistake to appear profoundly shocked and to tell the child that such language "is a big sin, and God won't love you any more." To tell a child that is to give him a distorted idea of God and a tangled conscience that perhaps never will quite get straightened out. Sin is too awful an evil to be used as a bogeyman to teach a child good manners. It should be enough to tell a child quietly: "That isn't a nice word, Joey; it isn't a *sinful* word, but it's what we call a *vulgar* word, and Mother (or Daddy) wishes you wouldn't use it." For most youngsters, a request such as this will be enough. If a child's lapses are too frequent, it may be necessary to explain to him that there is a sin of disobedience involved. But always, in the moral education of children, there should be adherence to the truth.

**Discussion:** 1. What should parents remember in training the consciences of their children? 2. What is the difference between vulgarity and sin? 3. How may a child be given a distorted idea of God? 4. When might the vulgar language of a child be a sin?

Blasphemy is the sin which is most directly opposed to the second commandment. One who uses profanity dishonors God by using His name carelessly, thoughtlessly, disrespectfully as does he, also, who takes an oath when there is no need to take an oath. The perjurer, the one who takes an oath to tell the truth and then proceeds to tell a lie, dishonors God by making Him the unwilling witness to an untruth. One who curses dishonors God by asking God to work evil upon one of His own creatures. But the blasphemer dishonors God, not indirectly as do these others, but in the most direct way possible: by speaking insultingly of God or of what is dear to God.

He is guilty of blasphemy who speaks of God (or of the saints or of holy things) in a spirit of contempt or ridicule, or

in any other vicious spirit. There are varying degrees of blasphemy. Sometimes it is a thoughtless reaction to emotional strain, such as impatience or pique or pain: "If God is good, why does He let such things happen?" "God can't love me, or He'd never let me suffer like this." Sometimes blasphemy has a smart-alecky origin: "That cranky old Man upstairs won't let me do it." "If that guy goes to heaven, then I want to go to hell." Sometimes blasphemy is outright irreligious and even God-hating: "The Bible is just a bunch of fairy stories." "The Mass is a lot of hocus-pocus." Or even, "God is a fable and a myth."

In such blasphemies as these latter ones, there is, of course, the sin of heresy or infidelity as well as the sin of blasphemy. Any time that a blasphemous utterance contains a denial of a particular truth of faith — a denial of God's goodness or justice, for example, or a denial of the Blessed Mother's virginity, or of the power of prayer — then the sin of heresy is joined to the sin of blasphemy. (A denial of the faith in general would be the grave sin of infidelity.)

By its nature, blasphemy always is a mortal sin, because always it involves a *grievous* dishonoring of God. The only time blasphemy might be a venial sin would be when sufficient reflection or consent was lacking. Such an instance might be a blasphemy uttered under stress of great pain or anguish.

**Discussion:** 1. Why do we say that blasphemy is the sin most directly opposed to the second commandment? 2. When is a person guilty of blasphemy? 3. What are some of the causes of blasphemy? 4. When is the sin of heresy joined to the sin of blasphemy? 5. Why is blasphemy, by its nature, always a mortal sin?

With the sin of blasphemy we round out the catalogue of offenses against the second commandment: profanity, unnecessary or false swearing, vows rashly made or vows broken, cursing, and blasphemy. In a discussion of the commandments it is necessary to examine the negative side, in order that we may have a rightly formed conscience. However, it is true of the

second commandment, as it is true of all the commandments, that abstaining from outright sin is only half the picture. We must not only avoid what is displeasing to God; we also must *do* what is pleasing to Him. Otherwise our religion would be as one-sided as a man whose right arm and leg are missing.

On the positive side, then, we honor God's name when we reverently take an oath at a time when an oath is necessary. Under such circumstances an oath is an act of divine worship, meritorious and pleasing to God. The same holds true of a vow; a person who prudently binds himself under pain of sin to do something pleasing to God, is performing an act of divine worship, an act of the virtue of religion. And every subsequent action which pertains to the vow is likewise an act of religion.

Our opportunities for honoring God's name are not, obviously, limited to oaths and vows. There is, for example, the quite common and very praiseworthy practice of bowing the head or tipping the hat at the name of Jesus, whether pronounced by ourselves or by someone else in our hearing. When we hear the name of God or of Jesus misused by another, there is the admirable habit of making instant reparation by saying silently, "Blessed be God" or "Blessed be the name of Jesus." There also is the public reparation which we make for blasphemy and profanity each time that we join in reciting the Divine Praises after Mass or Benediction.

God's holy name also is publicly honored by the rallies, processions, and other group demonstrations which are held on special occasions, testimonials in which we should be eager to take part. Whether the divinity of Christ or the glory of His Mother is the proximate reason for such public manifestations, God and His holy name are being honored and God will bless us for our participation.

The important thing to remember is that if we love God truly we shall also love His name. It will be only with love that we shall speak it — with love and reverence and respect. If we have the unfortunate habit of profanity, we shall pray for the love we need; a love for God that will make the irreverent use of His name as bitter as quinine upon our lips.

Our reverence for God's name will lead us, too, to find a special joy in those prayers which are primarily prayers of praise — such as the "Glory be to the Father," which we recite so often, and the "Gloria" and the "Sanctus" of the Mass. We may even be moved to make use of the Book of Psalms as our occasional prayerbook, those beautiful hymns of David in which praise of God is sung and sung again — as in the 112th Psalm, which begins:

"Praise you servants of the LORD,  
praise the name of the LORD.  
Blessed be the name of the LORD  
both now and forever.

From the rising to the setting of the sun  
is the name of the LORD to be praised."

**Discussion:** 1. What are the possible sins against the second commandment? 2. Besides the avoidance of sin, what else does the second commandment require of us? 3. When is an oath pleasing to God? 4. How does a vow give honor to God? 5. What are some other ways in which we show honor to God's name? 6. If a person has the habit of profanity, what is his need? 7. In honoring God's name, what prayers will especially appeal to us?

#### MY APOSTOLATE:

1. I shall show my love for God by speaking His holy name always with reverence. If I fail in this, I shall examine into the cause and strive to curb my impatience or anger.
2. If a parent, I shall form a right conscience in my children with respect to their language and shall show them that love for God means love for His name.
3. I shall pray the "Glory be to the Father" in my rosary, and the "Gloria" and the "Sanctus" at the Mass with great thoughtfulness and devotion.



## WHY SUNDAY MASS?

A SONG which was quite popular during World War I has a line something like this: "Oh, it's nice to get up in the morning, but it's nicer to stay in bed." It is a rare Catholic who has not, at one time or another, voiced a similar sentiment as he rolled out of the sheets on a Sunday morning, feeling quite heroic as he arose in obedience to the third commandment of God: "Remember thou keep holy the Lord's day."

The fact that there *is* a Lord's day is something which follows quite logically from the natural law. The natural law (that is, man's obligation to be true to his nature as a creature of God) demands that we adore God. It demands that we acknowledge our complete dependence upon God and that we thank Him for His goodness to us. In practice we know that it would be impossible for the average human to maintain, all the time, a conscious state of adoration. And so it is to be expected that a definite time, or times, be set aside for the discharge of this absolutely necessary duty. It is in accordance with this need that one day out of seven has been set aside on which all men, everywhere, must consciously and deliberately give to God the homage which is His by right.

We know that in Old Testament times it was the seventh day of the week — the Sabbath day — which was observed as the Lord's day. That was the law as God gave it to Moses on Mount Sinai: "Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day" (Exodus 20:8). However, with the establishment of the New Law by Christ, the positive Liturgical Law passed away. The early Christian Church determined as the Lord's day the first day of the week, our Sunday. That the Church had the right to make such a law is evident from the many passages in the Gospels in which Jesus confers upon His Church the power to make laws in His name. For example, "He who hears you, hears me" (Luke

10:16) and "Whatever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven" (Matthew 16:19).

The reason for changing the Lord's day from Saturday to Sunday lies in the fact that to the Christian Church the first day of the week had been made doubly holy. It is the day on which Jesus conquered sin and death by His resurrection from the dead, to give assurance of our future glory. It is the day, too, which Jesus chose for the sending down of the Holy Spirit — the birthday of the Church. It is very likely, also, that the Church changed the Lord's day for a psychological reason: to emphasize the fact that the Old Testament worship of the Hebrews, which had been a preparation for the coming of the Messiah, was now at an end. The Christian religion was not a mere "revision" of the worship of the Synagogue; the Christian religion was God's final plan for the salvation of the world. The curtain of completion was drawn across the Sabbath. Christians would not be merely another "sect" among the Jews; they would be a new people with a new Law and a new Sacrifice.

**Discussion:** 1. What is the third commandment of God? 2. What does the natural law demand of us with respect to God? 3. Why is it to be expected that a definite time be set aside for the worship of God? 4. Which was the Lord's day in Old Testament times? 5. Why did the Church have the right to select as the Lord's day the first day of the week? 6. Why was the Lord's day changed to the first day of the week? 7. What is the psychological reason for changing the Lord's day from Saturday to Sunday?

Nothing is said in the Bible about the change of the Lord's day from Saturday to Sunday. We know of the change only from the tradition of the Church — a fact handed down to us from earliest times by the living voice of the Church. That is why we find so illogical the attitude of many non-Catholics, who say that they will believe nothing unless they can find it in the

Bible and yet will continue to keep Sunday as the Lord's day on the say-so of the Catholic Church.

"Remember thou keep holy the Lord's day." "Yes," we say, "but *how* must I keep it holy?" In her role of divinely established legislator, the Church answers our question by telling us that first and above all we must keep the Lord's day holy by assisting at the holy Sacrifice of the Mass. The Mass is the *perfect* act of worship, given to us by Jesus so that we might, with Him, offer adequate honor to God.

Sacrifice, in the religious sense, is the offering of a gift to God, accompanied by some manner of destruction of the gift on behalf of a group, by someone who has the right to represent the group. From humankind's very beginnings and among all peoples, sacrifice has been man's natural way of worshiping God. The group might be a family, a tribe, or a nation. The priest might be the father or the patriarch or the king; or, as designated by God for the Hebrews, the sons of Aaron. The victim (the gift offered) might be bread and wine or grain or fruit or animals. But in all these sacrifices there was one great defect: none of the gifts were really worthy of God; He Himself had made them all in the first place.

But now, in the Sacrifice of the Mass, Jesus has provided a gift that really is worthy of God, a perfect gift whose value is proportionate to God — the gift of God's own Son, co-equal with the Father. Jesus, the great High Priest, made that offering of Himself as Victim, once and for all on Calvary, where He was slain by the executioners. However, you and I could not be there on Calvary to unite ourselves with Jesus in the offering of this Gift to God. So Jesus has given us the Sacrifice of the Mass in which, through the change of the bread and wine into His own body and blood that were separated at His death on Calvary, He endlessly renews the offering of Himself to the Father *and gives us a chance to unite ourselves with Him in the offering*, gives us a chance to unite our love with His, to make ourselves a part of the Gift that is being offered. There could surely be no better way than this to keep the Lord's day holy and to sanctify the week that lies ahead.

**Discussion:** 1. How do we know that the Lord's day was changed from Saturday to Sunday? 2. Why is it illogical for non-Catholics to keep Sunday as the Lord's day? 3. How do we, first and above all, keep the Lord's day holy? 4. What is a sacrifice? 5. What was the one great defect in all pre-Christian sacrifices? 6. Why is the Mass the *perfect* sacrifice? 7. How does Jesus make it possible for us to join with Him in His sacrifice of Himself upon the Cross?

All our time belongs to God — as we ourselves belong to God. But God and His Church are very generous with us. They give us for our own use six days out of every seven — a total of 144 hours in which to work and recreate and sleep. Even with the one day which the Church reserves for God, the Church is very generous. As God's absolute own the Church takes only the one hour (perhaps a little more or a little less) which is required for our attendance at the holy Sacrifice of the Mass. The other twenty-three hours God surrenders back to us again for our own use and enjoyment. God will be grateful if we use some of this extra time for Him and His work — but the Mass is all that is strictly of obligation in the matter of worship. In practice, then, we are obliged to reserve for God's very own only one hour out of the weekly 168 hours which He has given us.

Recalling this, we can understand why it is a mortal sin to miss Mass deliberately on Sunday. We can understand the depth of ingratitude displayed by the person who is "too busy" or "too tired" to go to Mass, to give God the one hour that He asks for Himself; the person who, not content with the 167 hours he already has, steals from God the extra sixty minutes that are His. We can recognize the total lack of love — indeed, the lack of common decency — in the heart of him who will not, for one hour once a week, unite himself with Christ in order to adore adequately God the Most Blessed Trinity; to thank God for His blessings of the week that is past; and to beg His help in the week that is beginning.

Not only are we bound to assist at Mass; we are bound to assist at an *entire* Mass. If we were to miss an essential part of

the Mass — the Consecration or the priest's Communion — it would be almost equivalent to missing Mass entirely; and the sin would be a mortal sin, if our failure to be present were deliberate. To miss a small part of the Mass — coming in, for example, at the Epistle or leaving at the Last Blessing — would be a venial sin. This is something to remember, if we are inclined to dawdle in getting ready for Sunday Mass or if we are tempted to slip out early in order to "beat the traffic." The Mass is our weekly gift to God; it should not be an incomplete gift or a damaged gift. We would not dream of giving tarnished silver or shopworn linen as a wedding present; we should have at least an equal respect for God.

**Discussion:** 1. Why does all our time belong to God? 2. In what way has God been very generous with the time that belongs to Him? 3. Why is there deep ingratitude in being "too busy" or "too tired" to go to Mass? 4. When is it a mortal sin to miss a part of the Mass? 5. Why should we be careful to give a *complete* Mass to God?

To fulfill our obligation, we must be physically present at Mass, we must be a part of the congregation. We cannot discharge our Sunday duty by watching Mass on television or by watching Mass from across the street through open church doors when there is room inside. It may sometimes happen (as in small churches in resort areas) that the congregation overflows onto the street outside the church. In such a case we *are* assisting at Mass because we *are* a part of the congregation, we are actually physically present, as close as we can get.

Not only must we be physically present; we also must be *mentally* present at Mass. This means that we must have the intention, at least implicit, of assisting at Mass; and we must have some idea of what is going on. A person who would deliberately settle himself to sleep through the Mass, or who would deliberately pay no attention even to the principal parts of the Mass, would be guilty of a mortal sin. Lesser distractions and inattentiveness, if deliberate, would be venially sinful. In-deliberate distractions are not sinful.

However, our love for God surely will raise our appreciation of the Mass above the level of the measuring stick of sin. We shall be in our place before Mass begins and will remain until the priest has left the sanctuary. We shall unite ourselves with Christ in the offering of the Sacrifice and will follow the Mass attentively in prayer book or missal. If we do miss Mass, it will be only because a grave reason prevents our attendance: sickness, whether our own or of someone for whom we must care; distance and lack of transportation; or some unforeseen emergency that must be dealt with even at the cost of Mass.

Besides obliging us to assist at Sunday Mass, the third commandment also requires that we abstain from unnecessary servile work on Sundays; servile work being defined as that which requires the use of the body rather than of the mind. Primarily, it is to preserve the sanctity of Sunday and to guarantee time for men to worship and to pray that the Church has made the Lord's day a day of rest. But it also is because none knows better than she the limitations of the children whom God has created, their need for respite from daily drudgery, for time in which to enjoy the world of fellowship, of beauty, of knowledge, of creative activity which God has provided.

To engage in unnecessary servile work on Sunday is a sin, mortal or venial depending on whether the amount of time given to the work is slight or considerable. To work unnecessarily two and a half or three hours would be a mortal sin. In determining whether or not a particular work is permissible on Sunday, we have to ask ourselves two questions: is the work more mental than physical, as are typing, drawing, embroidering? If not, then is the work genuinely necessary, something that could not have been done on Saturday and cannot be put off until Monday, such as a farmer's feeding of his stock, a housewife making the beds and doing the dishes? It takes only honesty, not a lawyer, to answer such questions; and, if the answer to either is "yes," then the work is permissible on Sunday.

**Discussion:** 1. What does it mean to be *physically* present at Mass? 2. When might a person be physically present at Mass and still commit a mortal sin? 3. If we love God, what will

be our attitude towards the Mass? 4. For what kind of reason might we miss Mass without sin? 5. What else besides Mass does the third commandment require of us? 6. What is the primary reason that the Church made Sunday a day of rest? 7. How did the Church have us also in mind when she made this day a day of rest? 8. What two questions do we have to ask in determining whether a particular work is permissible on Sunday?

#### MY APOSTOLATE

1. I shall be strict with myself in getting to Mass on time and in staying to the very end.
2. I shall observe the physical rest of Sunday conscientiously; if a parent, I shall try to make it a genuinely happy day for my family.
3. Some of my time each Sunday, perhaps an hour, will be given to growth in holiness: spiritual reading, meditation, extra prayers.
4. If I know of any neighbor or acquaintance who is missing Mass because of lack of transportation, I shall offer to supply transportation, if I can.

PARENTS, CHILDREN, AND CITIZENS

PARENTS as well as children have need to examine themselves periodically on their fidelity to the fourth commandment of God. Explicitly God speaks to the children: "Honor thy father and thy mother," commanding them to love and respect their parents to obey them in all that is not sinful, and to help them when they are in need. However, even while He is speaking to the children, God is looking over their shoulders at the parents, implicitly commanding them to be *worthy* of the love and respect which the children are required to give.

In this matter of the fourth commandment, the obligations of parents and children alike stem from the fact that all rightful authority comes from God. Whether it be a parent or a civil ruler or a religious superior, their authority is ultimately God's own authority which He has chosen to share with them. Obedience given to them in their lawful capacity is obedience given to God and will be so regarded. It follows also that those who are superiors have a grave obligation, as agents and partners of God, to be faithful to the trust that God has placed in them. For parents in particular it should be a sobering thought to contemplate the strict accounting that they will have to render one day to God for the souls of their children.

This is a point that needs recalling by the money-short mother who is tempted to take a job outside the home; by the "go-getter" husband who brings home his bottled-up nervous tensions to discharge upon his family. It is a point that needs remembering by parents who leave their children with baby-sitters three and four nights a week; by parents who stage heavy-drinking and loose-talking parties in their home; by quarrelling parents who continually bicker in front of the children. In fact



this is a point to be emphasized for *any* parents who fail to see that raising their children in a peaceful, happy, and Christ-directed home is the main business of their lives.

What, in detail, are the principal duties of parents towards their children? There are, first of all, the obvious ones of physical care: food, clothing, housing, medical care as needed. Then there is the duty of raising a child to be a good citizen: a useful, self-supporting, well-informed, intelligently patriotic individual. There is the duty, also, of providing for the child's intellectual development to the degree that his own talents and family finances will permit. Since there can be no complete intellectual development without a knowledge (growing as the child grows) of the truths of faith, this means sending the child to a Catholic school, if at all possible — high school as well as grade school; college also, if he attends one. This, be it noted, is a duty which binds in conscience.

**Discussion:** 1. What is the fourth commandment of God? 2. In the fourth commandment, what is God's implicit command to parents? 3. In the fourth commandment, what is the basis of the obligations of parents and children alike? 4. What sobering thought do parents in particular find in the fourth commandment? 5. What are some of the ways in which parents may fail to make theirs a Christ-directed home? 6. What are the principal duties of parents towards their children?

Here we have passed from the natural needs of a child — physical, civic, and intellectual — to his spiritual and supernatural needs. Obviously, since the child is made for eternal life, the fulfillment of these needs is the most important of all parental duties. There is, first of all, the obligation to have the child baptized as soon as possible after birth, normally within two weeks, or a month at the very most. Then, as the child's mind begins to unfold, comes the duty of teaching the child about

God,<sup>1</sup> especially about His goodness and the loving care and the obedience we owe to God. As the child begins to talk, he also will be taught to pray, long before he goes to school.

If, unfortunately, a Catholic schooling is not possible, the child will be sent regularly to religious instruction classes for as many years as he remains in school. What he learns from instructions will be triply reinforced by what he sees at home. It is in this, especially, that Catholic parents will do their most fruitful work, because a child absorbs so much more fully what he *sees* than what he is told. That is why the best Catholic school in the world cannot make up for a lax Catholic home.

As the child grows, parents will keep an unobtrusive but watchful eye on his companions, his reading, his recreations, offering counsel and even firm insistence when any of these become questionable. The child will learn to love Sunday Mass and frequent confession and Communion, not by being "sent" but by proudly accompanying his parents in the fulfillment of these duties.

It all adds up to rather a large order; but fortunately God gives to good parents the wisdom they need for their job. And being good parents begins, strangely enough, not with the child but with a genuine love between husband and wife. Psychologists point out that parents who depend upon their children for their own emotional satisfaction rather than upon each other, can never be fully successful in rearing children. In such a case, love for the child is likely to be an over-possessive and jealous love that seeks satisfaction of self rather than the child's own best interests. Out of such a love rise spoiled children.

However, parents who truly love each other in God, and their children as gifts of God, may be comforted to know that not much else is needed, even if they never read a single book on child psychology (although such reading is surely advisable if the books read are sound.)

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1. See *Suggestions for the Parent-Educators* — No. 5D (Confraternity Publications, Paterson 3, N. J.), for information about the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine's program to help parents teach religion in the home to pre-school children.

They can make a lot of mistakes without doing the child any lasting harm. Because in such a home the child will feel loved, and *wanted*, and secure; he will grow up to be emotionally stable and spiritually strong.

**Discussion:** 1. Why is the fulfillment of the child's spiritual needs the most important? 2. What are a parent's first obligations with respect to a child's spiritual needs? 3. Why is the home more important than the school in the religious training of a child? 4. As a child grows older, over what things will parents keep a watchful eye? 5. Why is a genuine love for each other so necessary for successful parents? 6. Why can parents take comfort in the genuineness of their love for each other and for their children?

All of us, without exception, have duties to our parents. If our parents are dead, then our duties are quite simple: we remember them in all our prayers and Masses and occasionally have a Mass offered for the repose of their souls. If our parents are still living, then our duties will depend upon our age and our status and theirs. Or perhaps it would be more correct to say that the way of *fulfilling* our duties will vary according to age and status. Because, of course, *all* children, even though they themselves be married with families of their own, share the basic duties of love and respect for their parents.

Usually the debt of love is not a hard one to pay, mothers and fathers being what they are. But the duty of love does not cease in those cases, fortunately rare, where a parent proves to be unlovable on the natural level — a brutal father, for example, or a deserting mother. Then the child must love with the supernatural love that Christ commands us to have towards all unlovable people, even towards our enemies. We must wish them well, desire their eternal salvation, and pray for them. No matter what they may have done to us, we must be willing to extend them a helping hand, if and when we can.

With the progressive increase in life expectancy, married children are more and more often faced with the problem of an aged and dependent parent. What does filial love dictate in

such circumstances? Is it a strict duty to take the parent into one's own home, even though the home already is crowded with children and the wife already has more than she can do? That is not a question that can be answered with a yes or no. No two cases are alike, and the son or daughter faced with such a dilemma should talk it over with the pastor or confessor or Catholic marriage counselor. Here we must be content to observe that the whole history of man testifies to the fact that God does bless, with a very special blessing, those sons and daughters whose filial love is an unselfish love which proves itself by self-sacrifice. The duty of children to support indigent or disabled parents is plain enough; it is a duty that binds in conscience. But whether the duty must be fulfilled in the offspring's own home or in a home for the aged or other facility is a matter for individual counseling. It will be the genuineness of the love that is behind what is done that will count the most.

The respect which we owe to our parents comes almost as naturally as love in a truly Christian home: treating them with reverence, deferring to their wishes, accepting their corrections without insolence, seeking their advice regarding important decisions — such as the choice of a state of life, or the suitability of a prospective partner in marriage. In matters which pertain to a child's natural rights, parents may advise but they must not command. For example, parents may not command a child to get married, should the son or daughter prefer to remain single; they may not command their child to marry a certain person; they may not forbid their child to enter the priesthood or to embrace the religious life.

**Discussion:** 1. If our parents are dead, what are our duties to them? 2. If our parents are living, how will our duties to them vary? 3. What must be the child's attitude towards unworthy parents? 4. What problem often faces married children nowadays? 5. Why should married children seek counsel in such a case? 6. In what matters may a parent not command a child?

Concerning the duty of respect for parents, the most difficult period of a child's life is the period of adolescence. These are the "growing-up" years when the child is torn between the need for dependence on his parents and the emerging urge for adult independence. It is a stormy time for almost every youngster. Wise parents will try to temper their firmness with understanding and patience.

It hardly seems necessary to observe that hating one's parents, striking them, threatening them, seriously ridiculing or insulting them, cursing them, refusing them help when they are in grave need, or doing anything else to cause them grave sorrow or great anger, would be mortally sinful. These things would be sinful if done to a stranger; towards parents it would be evil twice compounded. Generally, however, a child's disobedience is a venial sin (or perhaps no sin at all) unless there is a serious matter involved (such as avoiding bad companions) or unless the disobedience springs from contempt for parental authority. Most childish disobedience is due to thoughtlessness or forgetfulness or carelessness and is lacking in the advertence and deliberateness necessary for sin, or at least grave sin.

We cannot end our discussion of the fourth commandment without referring to the obligation it imposes upon all of us to love our nation (our family on a larger scale); to be sincerely interested in its welfare, to respect and obey its lawful authority. Perhaps we should emphasize the word "lawful." Because citizens do of course have the right to defend themselves against tyranny (as in Communist lands) when their fundamental human rights are threatened. No government may interfere with an individual's (or a family's) right to worship God and to love according to His laws, to receive religious instructions and the ministrations of the Church. A government has not the right, any more than a parent, to command what God forbids or to forbid what God commands.

But, such cases excepted, the good Catholic will of necessity be a good citizen. Knowing that right reason requires that he work for the welfare of his country, he will exercise regularly his right to vote and will vote for the candidates (putting prejudices aside) whom he feels to be best qualified for public

office. He will obey his country's laws and will pay his taxes as his just contribution to the expenses of good government. He will help to defend his country in the event of a just war (as he would defend his own family against unjust attack), bearing arms if called upon to do so, judging his nation's cause to be just unless there is adequate and unquestionable evidence to the contrary. He will do all this, not solely from motives of natural patriotism but because his Catholic conscience tells him that respect for and obedience to the lawful authority of his government is service given to God, from whom all authority flows.

**Discussion:** 1. Why is adolescence the most difficult period of a child's life? 2. What kind of conduct towards parents would be mortally sinful? 3. Why is most childhood disobedience not seriously sinful, if at all? 4. Under the fourth commandment, what must be our attitude towards our country? 5. What may a government *not* command its citizens? 6. In case of war, when must we judge it to be a just war?

#### MY APOSTOLATE:

1. In my nightly examination of conscience I shall ask myself: "Have I fulfilled today well my duties towards my parents (living or dead)?" If a parent, I shall also ask: "Have I been a faithful trustee of God towards my children?"
2. If married, I shall suggest to my spouse that each night we recite together one "Our Father" for the intention that our love for each other may grow and endure.
3. As a parent I shall welcome my children's friends into our home even though it means added work and inconvenience for me.

### LIFE BELONGS TO GOD

**I**T IS only by God that human life is given; it is only by God that human life may be taken away. Every human soul is individually and personally created by God. God alone has the right to decide when that soul's time upon earth is finished.

It is only to human life that the fifth commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," refers. Animals have been given by God to mankind for man's use and convenience. It is no sin to kill animals for any reasonable cause, such as the elimination of pests, the providing of food, the performance of scientific experiments. It would be a sin to injure or kill animals without reason; but the sin would lie in the abuse of God's gifts. It would not be a sin against the fifth commandment.

The fact that human life belongs to God is so obvious that the gravity of the sin of murder — the unjust taking of another's life — is recognized even through the light of reason by all men of good will. The gravity of the sin of suicide — the deliberate taking of one's own life — is equally apparent. Since the person who deliberately takes his own life dies in the very act of committing a mortal sin, he cannot be given Christian burial. In practice, however, it is very seldom that a Catholic in his right mind will take his own life; and Christian burial is never denied when suicide seems to be the result of mental derangement, even temporary.

Is it ever lawful to take the life of another person? Yes, in self-defense. If my own life or the life of my neighbor is being threatened by an unjust aggressor and there is no way to stop the aggressor-murderer except by killing him, then I may do so. In fact it is permissible to kill in defense of property as well as in defense of life if it is a large amount of property that the criminal is threatening to take or destroy and there is no other way to stop him. It follows, then, that law-enforcement

officers are not violating the fifth commandment when, given no other way to stop or apprehend a dangerous criminal, they take his life.

A duel, however, does not qualify as self-defense. A duel is a prearranged combat between two persons, with deadly weapons, usually "for the defense of honor," real or imaginary. Dueling is a sin more common in continental Europe than in the United States. In an effort to stamp out this evil, the Church has imposed excommunication on all who take part in a duel, not only the actual combatants but also the second and any other willing spectators who do not try their best to prevent or stop the duel.

**Discussion:** 1. Why has God alone the right to decide the time of a person's death? 2. Why is it not a sin to kill animals for any reasonable cause? 3. What are the two most obvious sins against the fifth commandment? 4. When is it permissible to take the life of another person? 5. Why cannot a duel qualify as self-defense?

It should be noted that the principle of self-defense applies only when we are the victim of an *unjust* attack. It never is permissible directly to take the life of an innocent person in order to save one's own. If I am shipwrecked with another person and there is only food enough for one, I may not kill the other person in order to save my own life. Neither may an unborn infant be directly killed in order to save the life of the mother. The unborn child is *not* an unjust aggressor against the mother and has a right to life as long as God permits him to live. To destroy the life of an unborn child directly and deliberately is a most grave sin; murder made more vicious by sending into eternity a soul with no opportunity for baptism. This is another sin which the Church has tried to check by imposing excommunication on all who have any willing part in it: not only the mother but also the co-operating father and any doctor or nurse involved.



What about capital punishment? Basically, capital punishment is an extension of the principle of self-defense. One of the duties of government is to protect citizens against unjust attack. Therefore a lawfully constituted government has the right, for the common good of its citizens, to take the life of a person who, in a fair trial, has been convicted of a grave crime. And the executioner who is delegated by the government to carry out such a sentence of death commits no sin. This does not mean that the Church favors or *advocates* capital punishment. The Church says that it is permitted but leaves it to governments to incorporate it in their laws as they may judge it expedient. There *is* sin involved, however, if private citizens take into their own hands the execution of a real or a supposed criminal. "Lynch law" has no place in God's law. All who take part in a lynching, even if only by their approving presence, are guilty of the sin of murder.

The principle of self-defense extends to nations as well as to individuals. Consequently a soldier who is fighting for his country in a just war does not sin if he must kill in the line of duty. A war is considered to be just (a) if it becomes necessary for a nation to defend its rights in a grave matter; (b) if war is undertaken only as a last resort after all other possible methods of settling the dispute have been tried; (c) if the war is waged in accordance with the dictates of the natural law and international law; and (d) if the war is stopped as soon as due satisfaction has been given or offered by the unjust aggressor nation. In practice it may sometimes be difficult for the average citizen to decide whether or not a war upon which his nation embarks is a just war. It is seldom that the common man knows all the ins and outs of the international situation. But, just as children in doubtful matters must give their parents the benefit of the doubt, so also, in doubt as to the justice of a war, the citizen must give his government the benefit of the doubt. Even in a just war, however, it is possible to sin by the use of unjust means, such as the direct and indiscriminate bombing of non-combatants when there is no military target as objective.

**Discussion:** 1. When may we *not* take the life of another in order to preserve our own? 2. Why is the sin of abortion a most vicious kind of murder? 3. What is the difference between capital punishment and lynching? 4. What conditions are necessary for a war to be a just war? 5. In case of doubt as to the justice of a war, what is the duty of a citizen?

Our life is not our own. It is a gift from God, and we are His stewards in the care of it. That is why we must do all that we reasonably can to safeguard our own life and the life of our neighbor. It is plain enough that we become guilty of sin if we deliberately do physical harm to another; guilty of a mortal sin if the injury we do is a serious one. That is why fighting is a sin against the fifth commandment, as well as a sin against the virtue of charity. And because anger, hatred, and revenge can so easily lead to doing physical injury to others, they also are sins against the fifth commandment in addition to being sins against charity. If a fort is to be defended (in this case, life), the approaches to the fort must also be defended. Consequently the fifth commandment proscribes *all* that might result in the unjust taking of life or unjust physical injury.

Some practical applications flow from this. It is evident that one who deliberately drives a car in a reckless manner is guilty of grave sin, since he exposes his own life and the lives of others to unnecessary danger. This would be true also of one who drives a car knowing that his faculties have been deadened by alcohol. The drunk driver is a sinner as well as a criminal. In fact, drunkenness itself is a sin against the fifth commandment, even when the sin is not aggravated by car-driving. Excessive drinking, as well as excessive eating, are sinful in the first place because they injure the health of the over-indulger. Excessive drinking much more easily becomes a mortal sin than excessive eating, because intemperance in drink can lead to many other evil effects. Drunkenness becomes a mortal sin when it so befuddles a person that he no longer knows what he is doing. But even a lesser degree of deliberate

excess in drinking may be a mortal sin because of harmful consequences: damage to health, or scandal given, or duties to family or God neglected. The habitual and heavy drinker who judges himself free from serious sin simply because he always knows the time of day usually is deceiving himself; it is very seldom that grave harm is not being done to himself or others by his constant drinking.

Our responsibility to God for the life He has given us requires that we take reasonable care of our health. To expose our health to danger, deliberately and unnecessarily, or to neglect seeking medical help when we know or suspect that we have an illness which could be cured would be to fail in our duty as God's stewards. There are, of course, people who become *too* preoccupied with their health, never happy unless they are taking medicine. We call them hypochondriacs. Their trouble is in their minds rather than in their bodies. They are to be pitied because their sufferings are very real to themselves.

Discussion: 1. Why must we do our reasonable best to safeguard our own life and that of our neighbor? 2. Why are anger, hatred, and revenge sins against the fifth commandment? 3. How may the driver of a car sin against the fifth commandment? 4. Why are excessive eating and drinking contrary to the fifth commandment? 5. When may excessive drinking, even in a lesser degree, become a mortal sin? 6. In case of illness, what is our responsibility under the fifth commandment?

The life of the *whole* body is more important than any of its parts; consequently, it is permissible to have an organ or a member removed in order to preserve life. Obviously, the amputation of a gangrenous leg or the excision of a tumored ovary is morally right. It is sinful, however, to mutilate the human body unnecessarily; mortally sinful if the mutilation is serious either in itself or in its effects. A man or a woman who would have an operation performed directly to cause sterility would be guilty of grave sin; as would also be the surgeon who performs such an operation. Some states have laws providing for the

sterilization of the insane and feeble-minded. Such laws are contrary to God's law, since not even the government has the right to mutilate an innocent person. Much less has the government the right to kill or to permit the killing of an innocent person. So-called "euthanasia" — putting an incurable sufferer to death in order to end his misery — is a grave sin, even if the sufferer asks for it. *Life belongs to God*. If incurable suffering is part of God's plan for me, then neither I nor any human authority has the right to circumvent God's will.

Moving now from the realm of action to the realm of thought, we note that hatred (bitter unforgiveness which wishes harm to another or rejoices in his misfortune) and vengeance (which seeks ways to "get even" with another) almost always will be mortal sins. Theoretically it might be possible to hate "just a little" or to seek "just a little" revenge. But in practice the "just a little" is not so easily controlled.

The gravity of the sin of anger is not so simple to assess. Anger which is directed at an evil deed and not at a person (and which is not excessive) is no sin at all. This is what we call righteous anger. A good example is the anger of a parent (remember, not excessive!) at the misconduct of a child. The parent still loves the *child* but is angry at the child's wrong *conduct*. Anger, however, which is directed at persons — usually at someone who has hurt our pride or interfered with our convenience — and not at their evil deeds, is sinful anger. We may say, in general, that whenever we are angry because of what has been done to ourselves rather than because of what has been done to God, ours is the wrong kind of anger. Most such anger is of the unthinking and "flare-up" sort and is not grievously sinful. However, if we realize that we are sinfully angry at someone and we deliberately continue to feed and fan our anger, our sin does become grave. Or, if we have a hot temper by nature and we know we have a hot temper yet make no attempt to control it, then also we could easily become guilty of mortal sin.

There is one final way in which we may fail in our observance of the fifth commandment: by giving bad example. If it is a sin to kill or injure the body of our neighbor, it is even more serious to kill or to injure his soul. Any time that wrong words

or actions of my own are such as to encourage sin in another, I myself become guilty of the sin of scandal, the sin of bad example; a mortal sin, if the possible harm I do is serious. Spiritually as well as physically, I *am* my brother's keeper.

**Discussion:** 1. Why are sterility operations gravely sinful? 2. What is "euthanasia" and why is it morally wrong? 3. What is the sin of hatred? 4. When is anger not a sin? 5. How can we tell whether or not ours is the wrong kind of anger? 6. When does anger become a mortal sin? 7. Why is bad example such a grievous sin?

#### MY APOSTOLATE:

1. Knowing how offensive to God is the suffering of the innocent, I shall include the governors of nations in my daily prayers and Mass intentions, that they may have the grace to keep their nations from war.
2. I shall school myself in charity of thought and action towards others and, if a parent, shall train my children to similar charity — so that unchristian vengefulness may have no part in my life.
3. I shall give my support, both financial and personal, to those movements which are dedicated to the conquest of diseases such as cancer, polio, tuberculosis and will help support clinics and dispensaries for the poor, knowing that my zeal for His gift of life will be pleasing to God.

## CHAPTER XIII

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### COMMANDMENTS SIX AND NINE

THERE are two mistaken attitudes towards sex, both of them fairly common. One is the attitude of the modern hedonist — a hedonist being a person whose highest aim in life is pleasure. A hedonist looks upon the sexual power as a personal possession whose use is no one else's business except his own. To him (or her) the purpose of the genital organs is for self-gratification and physical thrills, nothing more. This is the attitude of the man-about-town and the bachelor girl of easy virtue, who dally often but never love. It is the attitude, too, of the men and women who appear often in the divorce courts, always seeking new worlds to conquer.

Then there is the other mistaken attitude, that of the prude, which looks upon sex as something nasty and degrading; as a necessary evil with which the human race has been saddled. The procreative faculty must be used, of course, for the propagation of the human race, but the act of physical union between husband and wife remains a defiling sort of thing which hardly bears thinking of. This unfortunate pattern of thought usually is acquired in childhood through the misguided training methods of parents or teachers. In their efforts to train the child to purity, adults sometimes give a child the impression that the private parts of his body are bad and essentially shameful rather than special gifts from God to be revered and cherished. The child gathers that sex is something that "nice people don't talk about," not even in their own home or to their own parents. The worst feature of this state of mind is that it tends to be self-perpetuating; the child trained in such a tradition passes it on in turn to *his* children. It is a mistaken concept of sex that mars many an otherwise happy marriage.

The truth is that the procreative power is a wonderful gift with which God has endowed humanity. God didn't have to

make the human race male and female. He could have made human beings a non-sexed type of being, Himself creating each body (as He does create each soul) by a direct act of His own. Instead, God in His goodness chose to share His creative power with mankind so that the beautiful institutions of marriage and parenthood might come into being. So that, too, through human fatherhood we might better understand the paternity of God, His justice and His providence; and through human motherhood, might better understand God's maternal tenderness, His mercy and compassion. So that the way might be paved, also, for the holy maternity of Mary, and so that in future time we might better understand the union between Christ and His Spouse the Church.

For all these reasons, and doubtless for other reasons buried in the depths of Divine Wisdom, God made man male and female. With Himself at the apex, God established a creative trinity — husband, wife, and Himself; husband and wife acting as God's instruments in the formation of a new human body, God in a sense standing by at their beck and call, ready to create an immortal soul for the tiny body that, under God, their love has fashioned.

**Discussion:** 1. What is a hedonist? 2. What is the hedonist attitude toward sex? 3. What is the attitude of the prude toward sex? 4. What mistake do parents and teachers sometimes make in training children to purity? 5. What is the truth about the procreative faculty? 6. What are some of the reasons why God made the human race male and female? 7. What is the "creative trinity" of marriage?

*This is sex, this is marriage.* Because it is the handiwork of God, sex is by its nature something good, something sacred and holy. It is not an evil thing, it is not a sordid and a tawdry affair. It is only when sex is torn from its holy framework of marriage and potential parenthood that evil and tawdriness enters in. It is not to the procreative power nor to the genital organs that the stigma of evil is attached; it is solely to the perverse human

will that turns sex from its true purpose and seeks to use it as a mere tool for pleasure and self-gratification — like a drunk swilling beer from an altar-chalice.

Not that it is any sin for husband and wife (to whom, and *solely* to whom the exercise of the procreative faculty belongs) — not that it is a sin for husband and wife to seek and enjoy pleasure in their marital embrace. On the contrary, God has attached a keen physical pleasure to that act in order to ensure the perpetuation of the human race. With no impulsion from physical desire and no reward of immediate pleasure, spouses might be reluctant to use their God-given power in the face of the burdens of prospective parenthood. God's command to increase and multiply might be frustrated. Since God has *given* the pleasure, it is not a sin for husband and wife to enjoy the pleasure, so long as God's purpose is not positively excluded.

But for many people — and at one time or another probably for most people — that God-given pleasure poses a danger and a stumbling block. As a result of original sin, the perfect control which reason should exert over the body and its desires has been gravely weakened. Under the urgent proddings of rebellious flesh, there is a hunger for the pleasure of sex, regardless of God's purposes and regardless of the strict limitation (within Christian marriage) which God placed upon the use of sex. In other words, we are afflicted with temptations against the virtue of chastity.

This is the virtue which God demands of us in the sixth and ninth commandments: "Thou shalt not commit adultery" and "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife." We recall that the commandments as we have them are intended to be memory helps: pigeonholes in which we can classify our various duties to God. Each commandment mentions specifically one of the most serious sins against the virtue to be practiced ("Thou shalt not kill," "Thou shalt not steal") and under that one heading are grouped all the duties and all the sins of an allied nature. Thus, not only is it a sin to kill, it is also a sin to fight and to hate; not only is it a sin to steal, it is also a sin to damage property or to defraud. Similarly, not only is it a sin



to commit adultery — carnal intercourse when one (or both) of the participants is married to someone else; it is also a sin to commit fornication — sexual intercourse between two unmarried persons; it is also a sin to indulge in *any* deliberate actions, such as touches with oneself alone or with another, for the purpose of arousing the sexual appetite outside of marriage. Not only is it a sin to covet a neighbor's wife; it is also a sin to willingly entertain unchaste thoughts or desires concerning *any* person.

**Discussion:** 1. Why is sex not a sordid and a tawdry affair? 2. Why has God attached a keen physical pleasure to the use of the procreative faculty? 3. What effect has original sin had upon the procreative faculty? 4. Besides adultery, what are the other sins against the sixth commandment? 5. In what way does a person sin against the ninth commandment?

Chastity — or purity — is defined as the moral virtue which rightly regulates all voluntary expressions of sexual pleasure in marriage and excludes it altogether outside the married state. Sins against the virtue of chastity differ from sins against most other virtues in one notable point: a thought, word, or action against the virtue of chastity, if fully deliberate, is *always* a mortal sin. One may violate other virtues, even deliberately, and yet sin venially because of the slightness of the matter. A person may be slightly intemperate, slightly dishonest, slightly untruthful. But no one can be "slightly" unchaste if his violation of purity is fully voluntary. Whether in thought or word or deed, there is no "small matter" touching this virtue.

The reason should be quite plain. The procreative power is the most sacred of all man's physical gifts, the one which involves God most directly. Its very sacredness makes its defilement the more malicious. Add to this the fact that sex (to use the common term) is the very wellspring of human life. Poison the spring, and you have poisoned humanity. That is why God has erected a high, tight fence around the spring and has posted signs for all to see: **NO TRESPASSING!** God is adamant that His plan for the creation of new human life shall not be twisted from

His hand and distorted into an instrument to satisfy a perverse greed for pleasure and excitement. The only time that a sin against chastity can be a venial sin is when there is a lack of full realization or a lack of full consent.

The matter is somewhat different with respect to the virtue of modesty. Modesty is a virtue distinct from chastity, although it is chastity's guardian, the keeper of the approaches to the citadel. Modesty is the virtue which moves a person to abstain from any actions, words, or looks which are likely to arouse unlawfully the sexual appetite — in oneself or in others. Such actions might be indiscreet kissing, embracing, caressing; might be extreme forms of dress, such as Bikini bathing suits or plunging necklines; might be the hot-eyed reading of an obscene "modern" novel. Such words might be the telling or listening to suggestive or off-color stories, singing or enjoying lewd songs and double-meaning talk. Such looks might be a roving eye on a bathing beach or a windy corner, a drooling contemplation of so-called "leg art" on calendars and in magazines. It is true that "to the pure all things are pure"; but it also is true that to the pure all things are offensive which threaten purity.

**Discussion:** 1. What is chastity? 2. How does the virtue of chastity differ from most other virtues? 3. Why can there be no "small matter" in sins against chastity? 4. When may a sin against chastity be a venial sin? 5. What is the virtue of modesty?

Unlike chastity, sins against modesty may sometimes be venial. Failures in modesty which are directly aimed at unlawfully arousing the sexual appetite always are mortal sins. Barring that, the gravity of sins against modesty will depend upon the intention of the sinner, the degree to which the immodesty does excite sexual stirrings, and the amount of scandal that may be given. One facet of the matter that should be remembered by the ladies is the fact that God, in providing for the perpetuation of the human race, has made man the active principle in the act of procreation. For this reason a man's desires, normally, are much more easily aroused than a woman's.

It can happen that a girl, in all innocence, will indulge in a bit of affectionate interplay which to her is no more than a romantic moment under the moonlight; and yet to the boy involved it may have been the occasion of a mortal sin. In the same sort of ignorant innocence a woman may offend against modesty in dress unintentionally, simply because she judges the strength of a man's sexual drives by her own.

In our contemporary American culture, there are two "soft" spots that have need of special emphasis in a discussion of the virtue of chastity. One is the widespread practice of steady company-keeping on the part of adolescents. As early as the eighth and ninth grades boys and girls are pairing off, "going steady," exchanging rings and pins, spending two and three nights a week in one another's company. Such steady company-keeping (going always and frequently with the same person of the opposite sex for a long period of time) is always a danger to purity. For those old enough to get married and able to get married should they so wish, the danger is justified; a reasonable courtship is necessary in order to find a suitable partner for marriage. But for young adolescents who are in no position to be married for several years, *steady company-keeping is a sin* because it is an unjustified occasion of sin, one which foolish parents all too often encourage because they think it is "cute."

Another form of company-keeping that is sinful, and sinful by its very nature, is the dating of divorced persons. In this instance the company-keeping does not have to be steady, either. One date with a divorced man (or woman) may be enough to get the other person's heart involved — and the end-result so easily becomes sins of adultery or lifelong adultery in a marriage outside the Church.

Sometimes, in moments of severe temptation, we may feel that this wonderful power of procreation which God has given us is a questionable blessing. At such times we have only to remind ourselves of two things. Of the fact, first of all, that there is no real virtue, or proven goodness, without effort. A person who never has any temptations may be said to be innocent, but he cannot be said to be *virtuous* in the ordinary (not the

theological) meaning of the word. God, of course, can impart surpassing virtue without the test of temptation, as He did in the case of our Blessed Mother. But normally it is precisely in the conquest of strong temptations that a person becomes virtuous and acquires merit in heaven.

We need to remind ourselves, too, that the bigger the temptation, the more grace God will give us — if we want it, if we will use it, if we will do our part. God will never let us be tempted beyond our ability (with the help of His grace) to resist. No one can ever say, "I sinned because I couldn't help it." Our part, of course, is to avoid unnecessary danger; to be faithful to prayer, especially in time of weakness; to be frequently at confession and Holy Communion and Holy Mass; to have a very real and personal devotion to Mary, our Mother Most Chaste.

**Discussion:** 1. When are sins against modesty mortal sins? 2. Why should women be mindful that God has made man the active principle in the act of procreation? 3. Why is it sinful for young adolescents to keep steady company? 4. Why are even occasional dates with a divorced person morally wrong? 5. Why do we say that there is no virtue, as we commonly use the word, without temptation? 6. Of what do we need to remind ourselves in time of temptation? 7. What is "our part" in safeguarding our purity?

#### MY APOSTOLATE:

1. Among those with whom I work and recreate, I shall set an example by the cleanness of my speech and the modesty of my dress and actions.
2. If a single person, I shall make my company-keeping a time of grace rather than an occasion of sin. By prayer and frequent Holy Communion I shall have strength enough, if necessary, for both of us.
3. If a parent, I shall teach my children to have great reverence for their bodies as the handiwork of God and special reverence for their genitals as being particularly precious to God.

MINE AND THINE

IS IT a sin for a starving man to seize a loaf of bread even if he has to break the bakery window to get it? Is it a sin for a man to steal tools from the shop where he works if everyone else is doing it? If a woman finds a diamond ring and no one comes around to claim it, may she keep it? Is it wrong to buy tires at a bargain price if you suspect that they were stolen? The seventh commandment of God says, "Thou shalt not steal," and it sounds very simple on the face of it; until the ifs and the ands begin to come rolling in.

Before proceeding to an examination of the seventh commandment, we might do well to dispose very briefly of the tenth commandment: "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's goods." The tenth commandment is the companion of the seventh, just as the ninth commandment is the companion of the sixth. In both cases we are forbidden to do in our thoughts what it would be sinful to do in our actions. It is therefore not only a sin to steal, it also is a sin to *want* to steal; to wish that we might get and keep for ourselves something that belongs to another. Whatever we may say as to the nature and gravity of dishonest actions would apply also to dishonest thoughts — except that there is no "paying back" to do when dishonesty is confined to thought. This is a point to keep in mind concerning all the commandments: the fact that sin is committed the moment that a person deliberately desires or decides to commit a sin. The actual deed aggravates the guilt, but the sin really is committed the moment the decision is made or the desire is consented to. For example, if I were to decide to steal a certain article if I got the chance but then something happened which made it impossible to carry out my plan, I still would have the sin of intended theft upon my conscience.

Now, to what does the seventh commandment oblige us? It demands of us that we practice the virtue of justice, which is

defined as the moral virtue which impels a person to give to everyone his due, that which is his by right. There are many ways in which the virtue of justice may be violated. There is first of all the sin of stealing — stealing by stealth, which we call theft, or stealing by violence, which we commonly call robbery. Stealing is the voluntary taking or keeping of something that belongs to another, against the owner's reasonable will. "Against the owner's reasonable will" is an important clause. Life is more important than property. It would be unreasonable to refuse to give to another what that other person needs to save his life. Thus the starving man who takes the loaf of bread is not stealing. The refugee who takes a car or a boat to escape the pursuers who threaten his life or liberty is not stealing.

**Discussion:** 1. Which is the seventh commandment? 2. Which is the tenth commandment? 3. In what way do the seventh and tenth commandments resemble the sixth and ninth? 4. What point should we keep in mind concerning all the commandments? 5. What is the virtue of justice? 6. What is the difference between theft and robbery? 7. Why would it not be a sin for a starving man to take some food without permission?

"Against the owner's reasonable will" also distinguishes stealing from borrowing. If my neighbor is not at home and I take the mower out of his garage to cut my lawn, knowing that he would not object, then it is plain that I am not stealing. It is equally plain that it is not lawful borrowing to take something secretly if I know that the owner *would* object. The employee who borrows from the till, even though he intends someday to pay back what he "borrows," still is guilty of a sin.

Following the principle that anything which deprives another against his will of what is his is a sin if deliberate, we can see that there are many other ways besides stealing in which the seventh commandment may be violated. To break a lawful contract or business agreement with another would be such a

sin if it causes a loss to the other party. It also would be a sin for a person to incur debts which he knows he cannot pay — a not uncommon sin in this age of living beyond one's means. It likewise would be a sin to damage or destroy another's property deliberately.

Then there is the sin of cheating: depriving another of what is his, by deceit, by fraud. To this category belong such practices as short-weight, short-measure, short-change, cheapening a product without cheapening the price, misrepresenting merchandise (used-car salesmen — in fact, salesmen in general — need to be on their guard against this) and selling at exorbitant profits, passing counterfeit money, selling worthless stock, and all the swindles and get-rich-quick schemes so prolific in American life. It is a form of cheating, too, for an employer to underpay his help, refusing them a living wage simply because a plentiful labor market makes it possible for him to be able to say, "If you don't like it here, then get out." And workmen who *do* receive a just wage become guilty of sin if they deliberately waste an employer's time or materials and fail to give a fair day's work for a fair day's wage.

Public officials are another class of persons who need to be especially mindful of the seventh commandment. Public officials are chosen by (and paid by) the citizens for the purpose of executing the laws and administering public affairs in an impartial and conscientious manner, for the greatest good of all. An official who accepts bribes — however sweetly the bribes may be disguised — in exchange for political favors is betraying the trust of those who have elected or appointed him. He sins against the seventh commandment; as he also would sin who would demand a "kick-back" from the salaries of lesser office-holders.

Two other failures in justice will complete the major offenses against the seventh commandment. One is the receiving of goods which we know to be stolen, whether the stolen goods are given to us freely or whether we pay for them; and strong suspicion is equivalent to knowledge in this respect. In the eyes of God, the receiver of stolen goods becomes equally guilty with the

thief. It is a sin also to keep *found* articles for ourselves without making a reasonable effort to find the owner. The extent of such an effort (inquiry and advertisement) will, of course, depend upon the value of the article; and the owner, if discovered, is bound to reimburse the finder for whatever expenses his inquiries have entailed.

**Discussion:** 1. How do we distinguish stealing from borrowing? 2. When is an action a sin of stealing, even though there is the intention to "pay back" what is taken? 3. When is the breaking of a contract a sin against justice? 4. Under what circumstances would it be a sin to buy on credit? 5. What are some forms of the sin of cheating? 6. What are the obligations of an employer with respect to justice? 7. What are the obligations of an employee? 8. Why is it sinful to accept bribes? 9. When may we keep stolen goods?

We cannot measure moral evil with a yardstick — nor compute it on an adding machine. So when someone asks, "How much of a theft does it take to make a mortal sin?" there is no quick and ready answer. We cannot say, "Anything up to \$49.99 will be a venial sin; from \$50.00 up will be a mortal sin." We can only say in general that the theft of something of small value will be venially sinful; the theft of something of great worth (whether the great worth is *relative* or *absolute*) will be a mortal sin. This, of course, will be true not only of actual theft but of all other sins against property rights: deliberate damage to another's property, cheating, receiving stolen goods, and so on.

When we speak of the *relative* worth of something, we are referring to the value which it has considering the circumstances. For an ordinary workingman with a family to support, the loss of a day's wages would normally be a serious loss. To rob or cheat him of the equivalent of a day's pay could easily be a mortal sin. The gravity of the sin of dishonesty, then, is measured by the harm it does to the one who is deprived, as well as by the actual value involved.



But, in judging the worth of a thing (or of an amount of money), we reach a point where all reasonable persons will agree that the value is considerable — whether it is a rich man or a poor man who suffers the loss. This is what we term the *absolute* value, the value regardless of circumstances. It is here that the shading between mortal sin and venial sin becomes a matter known only to God. We can say with certainty that it is a venial sin to steal a nickel and that it is a mortal sin to steal a hundred dollars — even from the General Motors Corporation; where exactly to put the dividing line no man can say. Ten years ago, theologians were agreed that fifty dollars or more would be absolutely grave matter; injustice at that point and beyond would be a mortal sin. However, a dollar today is worth much less than it was ten years ago, and theology books cannot be revised on a monthly “cost-of-living” index. The obvious conclusion is that, if we are scrupulously honest in all our dealings with our fellowman, we shall never need to ask, “Was it a mortal or a venial sin?” For him who *has* sinned against justice, another obvious conclusion is to be sorry for the sin, confess it, make good the injustice, and not do it again.

**Discussion:** 1. Why is it often difficult, in sins against justice, to distinguish between mortal and venial sin? 2. What do we mean by the *relative* worth of a thing? 3. What is the *absolute* value of a thing? 4. When shall we never need to ask, “Was it a mortal or a venial sin?”

Which brings us to the question of restitution — the paying back of what we have gotten dishonestly or damaged unjustly. True sorrow for sins against the seventh commandment must always include the intention to pay back as soon as possible (right *now* if we can) the fruits of our dishonesty. Without that sincere intention on the part of the penitent, the sacrament of Penance is powerless to forgive a sin of injustice. If the sin has been a mortal sin and the thief or the cheater dies without having made any attempt at restitution even when he could have done so, then he dies in the state of mortal sin. He has

bartered away his eternal happiness in exchange for his dishonest gains.

Even a venial sin of injustice cannot be forgiven unless restitution is made or sincerely intended. The person who dies with petty thefts or frauds unatoned for will find that the price he has to pay in Purgatory for his chicanery is far beyond whatever illicit profits he may have realized during life. Concerning venial sins against the seventh commandment, we might point out in passing that even small thefts can become mortally sinful if there is a continuous series of such thefts within a brief period of time, which, in the aggregate, amount to a large total. A person who dishonestly acquired the value of a dollar or two a day over a period of several weeks would be guilty of mortal sin if the total value reached the amount of gravely sinful matter.

There are certain fundamental principles governing the matter of restitution. First is the principle that restitution must be made *to the person who suffered the loss* — or to his heirs if he is dead. But suppose that the person cannot now be found, even by diligent inquiry, or his heirs are unknown. Then another principle comes into play: a person may not profit by his own dishonesty. If the true owner is unknown or cannot be found, then restitution must be made by giving the illicit gains to charity — for example, by donating the amount to the St. Vincent de Paul Society. It is not required that the person making restitution expose his dishonesty or ruin his reputation to do so; he can make restitution anonymously, by mail or through a third party or in any other way that will protect his good name. Nor is it required that a person deprive himself or his family of the ordinary necessities of life in order to make restitution. It would be very wrong to spend money on superfluities or luxuries until restitution has been made; on fur coats or new cars. But this does not mean living on canned beans and sleeping on park benches.

Another principle is that the article itself which was stolen (if it was an article) must be restored to the owner, together with any natural profit which resulted from the article; the calves, for example, from a stolen cow. It is only when the

article itself is no longer in existence or damaged beyond use that restitution may be made in cash value instead.

Perhaps enough has been said to indicate how complicated questions sometimes can be which pertain to matters of justice and rights. In practice, in particular cases, it is best to consult a priest. And we should not be surprised, in matters that are involved, if even the priest has to consult his theology books.

**Discussion:** 1. What do we mean by "restitution"? 2. Why must sorrow for sins against the seventh commandment always include the purpose of making restitution? 3. When is it possible for small thefts to become a mortal sin? 4. What is the first principle involved in restitution? 5. If he cannot make restitution to the owner, what must a person do with his illicit gains? 6. In making restitution, when may we substitute cash for a stolen article?

#### MY APOSTOLATE:

1. If I buy on credit, I shall be scrupulous in buying only what I know I can pay for within the time agreed upon.
2. If a parent, I shall teach my children to respect the property of others — including street lamps and the windows of vacant houses.
3. Whether I am an employer or an employee, I shall practice conscientious justice in my working relations.

### NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH

THE fifth commandment forbids many other things besides outright murder. The sixth commandment applies to many other sins besides marital infidelity. The seventh commandment extends to many dishonest actions besides simple theft. The commandments, as we know, are intended as memory helps. Each commandment mentions one specific sin against the virtue to which the commandment applies; and we are expected to use the commandment as a sort of shelf upon which we can gather together all other sins against the same virtue.

We would expect the eighth commandment to be of the same nature — and it is. “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor” explicitly forbids the sin of slander or calumny — the damaging of our neighbor’s reputation by lying about him. However, there are many other ways besides slander in which we can sin against the virtue of truthfulness and against charity in speech and action.

Calumny is one of the worst sins against the eighth commandment, because it combines a sin against truthfulness (lying) with a sin against justice (damaging another’s good name) and a sin against charity (failure in love of neighbor). Calumny hurts our neighbor where the pain is keenest — in his reputation. If we steal a man’s money, he may be angry and he may be sad, but normally he can go out and earn some more money. When we cast a shadow on a man’s good name, we have robbed him of something that all the sweat in the world may not be able to restore. As we can readily perceive, the sin of calumny is a mortal sin if by our slander we *seriously* hurt our neighbor in the esteem of only one other person. It is true even if our neighbor himself is unaware of what we have done.

In fact it is true even if we seriously hurt our neighbor’s reputation deliberately and unjustly, only in our own mind. This

is the sin of rash judgment, a sin concerning which many people, it is to be feared, neglect to examine themselves when preparing for confession. If someone does an unexpected kind deed and I think to myself, "I wonder whom he's trying to hook now?" I have been guilty of rash judgment. If someone performs an act of generosity and I say to myself, "There he goes, trying to act like a big shot," I have sinned against the eighth commandment. Not mortally, perhaps; although it easily can be a mortal sin if another's reputation suffers *seriously* in my own mind because of my unjust judgments.

**Discussion:** 1. What is the eighth commandment? 2. What is the sin of calumny? 3. Why is calumny one of the worst sins against the eighth commandment? 4. Why is calumny worse than theft? 5. When is calumny or slander a mortal sin? 6. What is the sin of rash judgment? 7. When does rash judgment become a mortal sin?

Detraction is another sin against the eighth commandment. Detraction consists of hurting our neighbor's reputation by unnecessarily telling something discreditable about him which is *true* but which is not commonly known. For example, I tell my friends or neighbors about the awful quarrels which the couple next door are always having and how the husband always comes home drunk on Saturday nights. There may be times when, for purposes of correction or prevention, it is necessary to reveal the faults of others. It may be necessary to tell a father about the bad company his son has been keeping. It may be necessary to tell the police about a certain person who was seen sneaking out of the burglarized store. It may be necessary to warn neighborhood parents that the newcomer on the street has a court record for molesting children. But, often, when we begin by saying, "I think I ought to tell you this. . . , " what we really mean is, "I'm dying to tell you this — but I can't admit even to myself that I love to gossip." Even though a person may have hurt his own reputation, so to speak, by doing something disgraceful, it still is a sin for me to spread knowledge of his

fault without necessity — somewhat as it would still be a sin for me to steal, even though I stole from a thief. It is not, of course, a sin of detraction to discuss matters which are common knowledge to everyone, such as the crime of a person who has been convicted in court of wrongdoing. Even in such cases, however, charity directs us to condemn the sin rather than the sinner and to pray for the wrongdoer.

There are sins of the ear, as well as sins of the mouth and mind, against the eighth commandment. We become guilty of sin if we listen with pleasure to slander and detraction even though we say nothing ourselves. Our very silence is an encouragement to the spreader of malicious gossip. If our pleasure in listening springs merely from curiosity, the sin would be a venial one. If our eager attention were motivated by hatred for the person being defamed, the sin would be mortal. Our duty, when someone's character is attacked in our presence, is to try to change the subject or otherwise show that we are not interested in listening.

Personal insult also is a sin against the eighth commandment. (Theologians prefer the term "contumely.") This sin against our neighbor is committed in his presence and has many forms. In speech or in action we may refuse him the marks of decent respect or friendship that are due him, as by "cutting him dead" or ignoring his outstretched hand, by speaking to him rudely or abusively, by calling him opprobrious names. A similar sin of lesser degree is spiteful criticism and faultfinding, a sin which in some persons seems to become an established habit.

Talebearing is still another sin against the eighth commandment. This is the sin of the trouble-loving busybody who tells Joe what Jack said about him. Here again the talebearing usually is prefaced with, "I think you ought to know. . .," when actually it would be much better for Joe if he *didn't* know the nasty crack that Jack made about him, a crack that probably was tossed off thoughtlessly in a moment of irritation. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God" is a good quotation to remember here.

Discussion: 1. In what does the sin of detraction consist? 2. When is it permissible to reveal the faults of another? 3. In the case of faults which are commonly known, what should be our attitude? 4. How may we sin against the eighth commandment with our ears? 5. What are some of the ways in which the sin of contumely may be committed? 6. What is a good Scriptural quotation for the talebearer to remember?

A *simple* lie — a lie which does no harm and is not told under oath — is a venial sin. Simple lies are the kind that braggarts tell about themselves (and sometimes fishermen tell). They are the lies which people tell to save embarrassment to themselves or to someone else. They are the lies of which practical jokers are fond. Whatever may be the reason for departing from the truth, a lie is always a sin. God gave us the gift of communicating our thoughts to others in order that we might communicate truth. Any time we use speech or actions to communicate falsehood we are abusing one of God's gifts; we sin.

It follows that there is no such thing as "a little white lie." Moral evil, even the moral evil of a venial sin, is greater than any possible physical evil. It would not be permissible for me to commit even a venial sin in order to save the whole world from destruction. However, it should be mentioned that I may, without sin, give a false answer to someone who is *unjustly* trying to get the truth from me. What I say in this instance may be false, but it is not a lie. It is a lawful means of self-defense when there is no other alternative.

Neither am I obliged always to tell *all* of the truth. Unfortunately, there are many nosy people in the world who ask questions which they have no right to ask. To such persons it is quite legitimate to give an evasive answer. If someone asks me how much money I've got (I suspect he wants to make a touch) and I tell him that I've got five dollars when actually I have fifty, I tell no lie. I *have* got five dollars; I just don't tell him about the other forty-five. Obviously, however, it would be a lie to say that I have fifty when I have only five.

There are certain conventional phrases, too, which on the face of them might appear to be lies but which are not lies because all intelligent people understand what they mean. "I don't know" is an example of such a phrase. An intelligent person understands that "I don't know" may mean either of two things: I *really* don't know or I am not at liberty to tell. This is the answer that a priest — or a doctor or lawyer or parent — might give to someone seeking information which is confidential. A similar phrase is "Not at home." To be "not at home" may mean that the person really is away or that he is not seeing visitors. It is not a sin if Mary tells the caller at the door that mother is not at home; Mary doesn't have to tell the caller that mother is in the bathtub or in the basement washing clothes. A person who is deceived by phrases such as these (and there are others, universally understood) is not *being* deceived; he deceives himself.

**Discussion:** 1. What is a "simple" lie? 2. Why is a lie always a sin? 3. Why can there be no such thing as a "white lie"? 4. What is the difference between telling *part* of the truth and telling an untruth? 5. Why are certain conventional phrases which might appear untruthful actually not so?

The same principle would apply to a person who accepts as true a story which is told as a joke and which so obviously is a joke that any intelligent person should recognize it as such. For example, if I say that back home on the farm our corn grew so high that we had to harvest with helicopters, anyone who accepts that as a fact is plainly deceiving himself. However, joking lies can be real lies — and sinful — if it is not plain to the listener that I am joking.

Another possible sin against the eighth commandment is the revealing of a secret which has been entrusted to me. My obligation to secrecy may arise from a promise made, or from my profession (doctor, lawyer, newsman, etc.), or simply because charity forbids that I make known what would offend or hurt another. The only times I might reveal such a secret without sin would be when it was necessary in order to prevent grave



harm — to the community, to an innocent third party, or to the holder of the secret himself. Akin to this sin is the sin of reading another's mail without his permission and the sin of deliberately listening-in on a private conversation. In all these instances, the gravity of the sin will be proportionate to the harm done or the offense given.

Before we close the book on the eighth commandment, we must recall that this commandment, like the seventh, *obliges us to restitution*. If I have hurt another, whether by slander, detraction, insult, or revealing his secret, my sin cannot be forgiven unless I intend to make good the harm I have done, to the best of my ability. This holds true even though, in making restitution, I must suffer humiliation or other harm myself. If I have slandered, I must broadcast the fact that I was grossly mistaken. If I have detracted, I must, by honest praise and pleas for charity, try to outbalance the effects of my detraction. If I have insulted, I must apologize; publicly, if the insult was a public one. If I have violated a secret, I must repair the harm in whatever way I can and as far as I can.

All of which should lead us to renewed determination in two resolutions which we have no doubt long ago made: never to open our mouths except to say what we honestly believe to be true; and never to speak about our neighbor, even the *truth* about him, unless what we say is to his credit; or, if it is detrimental to his character, is called for because of some grave reason.

**Discussion:** 1. When is a joking exaggeration not a lie? 2. From what source may an obligation to secrecy arise? 3. When may a secret be revealed? 4. In sins which violate secrecy, how do we establish the gravity of the sin? 5. In what way is the eighth commandment akin to the seventh? 6. In what ways do we make restitution for sins against the eighth commandment? 7. What are two resolutions which all of us should make?

#### MY APOSTOLATE:

1. If I am in a group when someone's reputation is attacked, I will counter by telling something favorable about the

person; if I cannot (and am unable to leave the group), then I shall say a silent prayer for the one whose good name is suffering.

2. Knowing that racial discrimination (refusing to wait on a Negro in a store or restaurant, refusing to sit next to him, resenting a Negro family in the neighborhood) is a form of contumely, I shall resist all forms of racial injustice.
3. If a parent, knowing that I am a pattern for my children, I shall be scrupulously truthful *to* them and in their presence.

### LAWS OF THE CHURCH

OCCASIONALLY we meet persons who seem to think that the laws of the Church are less binding upon us than are the laws of God. "It is only a law of the Church," such a one is likely to say. "Only a law of the Church" is a nonsense phrase. The laws of the Church are practically the same as the laws of God, because they are applications of these laws. One of the reasons Jesus established His Church was precisely this: to make whatever laws would be necessary to implement His teachings — whatever laws would be necessary for the good of souls. As a reminder of this we have only to recall Christ's words, "He who hears you, hears Me; and he who rejects you, rejects Me" (Luke 10:16). It was to His Church, in the person of the apostles, that Christ was speaking. The laws of the Church, then, have all the authority of our Lord behind them. To break a law of the Church deliberately is just as truly a sin as to break one of the Ten Commandments.

How many laws of the Church are there? Most people probably would answer "six," since that is the number listed in the Catechism. Actually, there are 2,214 laws of the Church. They are contained in an official book called the Code of Canon Law. These laws cover many phases of Catholic life — when, how, and by whom the various sacraments may be received, vows may be taken, convents and monasteries may be established and governed, and hundreds of other matters pertaining to right order within Christ's Church. Many of these laws we learn in connection with our study of the Mass and the sacraments. Many others have no particular bearing on the life of the layman. But compilers of the Catechism have singled out six of these laws for our special attention — the ones which we commonly call the six commandments of the Church. They are: (1) to assist at Mass on all Sundays and holydays of obligation; (2) to

fast and to abstain on the days appointed; (3) to confess our sins at least once a year; (4) to receive Holy Communion during the Easter time; (5) to contribute to the support of the Church; and (6) to observe the laws of the Church concerning marriage.

**Discussion:** 1. What was one of the reasons Jesus established His Church? 2. In what words did Jesus make His Church His spokesman? 3. Why, then, do we say that the laws of the Church are the laws of God? 4. How many laws of the Church are there? 5. Which are the six that are most familiar to us?

The obligation to assist at Mass on Sundays — an obligation which begins for every Catholic at the age of seven — has been discussed under the third commandment of the decalogue: "Remember thou keep holy the Lord's day." There is no need to repeat that discussion here, but it may be useful to say a word or two concerning the holydays of obligation.

In her role of spiritual guide, it is the duty of the Church to make our faith a *living* faith; to make real and vital the persons and events which have gone into the making of Christ's Mystical Body. For this reason the Church sets aside a certain few days of the year to be observed as sacred days. On these days the Church recalls to our minds certain great events in the lives of Jesus Himself, or of His Blessed Mother, or of the saints. The Church underlines the need for such periodic recollection by making these days of equal dignity with the Lord's day — commanding us, under pain of mortal sin, to assist at Mass, and to abstain, if possible, from our everyday work.

In the calendar of the Church there are ten such days, and in most Catholic countries all ten are observed. In our own country, however, the Church has eased the burden of the American workingman (whose employer will take no cognizance of holydays) and has reduced the number of holydays of obligation to six: Christmas (December 25), when we celebrate the birth of our Lord; the Circumcision (January 1), when we commemorate the official bestowal on Jesus of His Holy Name; Ascension Thursday (forty days after Easter), when we mark

our Lord's glorious return to heaven; the Assumption (August 15), when we rejoice at our Blessed Mother's bodily entrance into heaven; All Saints' Day (November 1), when we honor *all* the saints in heaven, including our own loved ones there; and the Immaculate Conception (December 8), when we commemorate the fact that God created Mary's soul free from original sin — the first step in our redemption.

Besides holydays there are other days of special significance to Catholics. These are the fast days and the days of abstinence. In reading the Gospels we must have noticed how, time and again, our Lord commands us to do penance for our sins. We ask: "Yes, but *how* shall we do penance?" The Church, fulfilling her duty as our guide and teacher, establishes a minimum of penance that all of us, within certain set limits, must perform. She does so by setting aside certain days as days of abstinence (when we may eat no meat); other days as days of fast (when we may eat only one full meal); and still other days as days of both fast and abstinence.

Since Friday is the day on which our Saviour died, the Church has chosen Friday as our weekly day of abstinence. Deliberately to eat meat (or meat products, such as gravy or soup made with meat) on a day of abstinence is a mortal sin if the amount taken is a significant one. But even a small amount — a few spoonfuls of meat soup, for example — would be a venial sin if taken deliberately.

The days which are *fast* days (but not days of abstinence) are the weekdays of Lent (except Fridays — which are days of fast *and* abstinence). On these days we are limited to one full meal, at which we may eat meat. If we are exempted from fasting, we may eat meat as often as we wish. On a fast day, besides the main meal, those obliged to fast may have two other light meals without meat — which together should amount to less than the main meal. In the United States, the Wednesdays and Saturdays of Ember weeks and the vigil of Pentecost are days of fast and *partial* abstinence. On these days meat is allowed only at the main meal, even for those who may be exempted from fasting.

Finally there are the days of fast and *complete* abstinence. The Fridays of Lent and of Ember weeks are such, obviously.

In addition, Ash Wednesday, Holy Saturday,<sup>1</sup> and the vigils of Assumption and Christmas are days of both fast and complete abstinence. On these days even our full meal must be a meatless one.

Sick persons who need the nourishment, those engaged in extremely hard work, and those who have to eat what they can get (the poor, for example) are excused from the laws of fasting and abstinence. Others, for whom fasting or abstaining would present a serious problem, may obtain a dispensation from their pastor or confessor. The obligation to abstain begins at the age of seven and continues for life; the obligation to fast begins at the age of twenty-one and ends at the age of fifty-nine.

Discussion: 1. Why did the Church institute holydays? 2. Which are the holydays of obligation in the United States? 3. What is a day of abstinence? 4. Which are the days of abstinence only? 5. What is a fast day? 6. Which are the days of fast only? 7. Which are the days of *both* fast and abstinence? 8. Who are excused from fast and abstinence? 9. At what age does the obligation to abstain begin? 10. Between what ages does the obligation to fast apply?

The law pertaining to yearly confession means this: anyone who is obliged to confess a mortal sin explicitly, becomes guilty of a new mortal sin if he lets more than a year elapse without again receiving the sacrament of Penance. Plainly the Church does not intend to say that yearly confession is sufficient for practicing Catholics. The sacrament of Penance builds up in us a resistance to temptation and enables us to grow in virtue if we receive it often. It is a sacrament for saints as well as for sinners.

However, the Church does want to make sure that no one goes on indefinitely living in the state of mortal sin at a constant peril to his eternal salvation. Hence the Church requires that anyone conscious of having a mortal sin to be confessed explicitly (even though the sin may already have been remitted by perfect contrition) must receive the sacrament of Penance within a

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<sup>1</sup>Sometimes a Bishop will dispense to the extent of making Holy Saturday a day of fast only — or a day of fast and partial abstinence.

year. Similarly, in her concern for souls, the Church establishes an absolute minimum of once a year for the receiving of Holy Communion. Jesus Himself said, "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, you shall not have life in you" (John 6:54). There are no ifs or ands there. Either members of Christ's Mystical Body receive Holy Communion or they do not go to heaven. We naturally ask, "How often should I receive Holy Communion?" Christ through His Church then answers us: "As often as you can; weekly, even daily, if possible. But as an absolute minimum you *must* receive Holy Communion at least once a year — and that during the Easter time; in the United States between the first Sunday of Lent and Trinity Sunday." If we fail to give Jesus this minimum of love, then we become guilty of a mortal sin.

Another of our obligations — to contribute to the support of the Church — flows from the very nature of our membership in Christ's Mystical Body. In Baptism and again in Confirmation, Jesus has made us sharers in His mission of saving souls. We are not truly Christ's own unless we are willing to help Him, with material means as well as with labors and prayers, to carry on His work. Normally, we discharge the obligation of material support by giving, as generously as our means allow, to the various collections taken up in our own parish church and in our own diocese. These will include not only offerings for the church and school of our own parish but also contributions to the Holy Father and his world-wide needs, as well as collections for the foreign missions, for the sick and the poor and the homeless. If we ask, "How much should I give?" there is no answer except the reminder that God will never let us outdo Him in generosity.

**Discussion:** 1. What does the law of yearly confession mean? 2. Why should we go to confession often? 3. What words of Christ tell us of the need for Holy Communion? 4. What two Sundays mark the beginning and the end of the Easter time in the United States? 5. Why would we be obliged to support the Church even if there were no church law in the matter? 6. If we give to all the collections taken up in our

parish church, to what other causes will we be contributing besides our own church and school?

That He might be with us always with the power of His grace, Jesus fashioned for us the seven sacraments. He confided the sacraments into the keeping of His Church. He gave to His Church the authority and the duty to make the necessary laws which would govern the giving of the sacraments and the receiving of them. Matrimony is one of these sacraments. It is important for us to realize that the Church laws regulating the reception of the sacrament of Matrimony are not mere man-made rules. They are Christ's own directives, given through His Church.

The basic law governing the sacrament of Matrimony is that it must be received in the presence of an authorized priest and two other witnesses. By "authorized" priest is meant the pastor of the parish where the marriage takes place, or a priest delegated by such pastor or by the bishop of the diocese. Just "any priest" may not officiate at a Catholic wedding. Marriage is too serious a commitment to be entered into by the mere ringing of any rectory doorbell. Normally, the sacrament of Matrimony is followed by a Nuptial Mass and the Nuptial blessing. The Nuptial Mass and blessing are not permitted, however, during the penitential seasons of Lent and Advent. The sacrament of Matrimony can be received during those times, but most Catholics are anxious to begin married life with all the grace possible. Hence it is rare that Catholics seek to receive the sacrament of Matrimony during Lent or Advent.

To receive Matrimony validly, the male spouse must be at least sixteen years of age, the feminine partner at least fourteen. However, if the civil law sets a higher age, the Church will respect that law though not be strictly bound to obey it. The preparedness of a boy and girl to take on the responsibility of a family is of civil as well as spiritual importance. In the matter of marriage, when the civil effects are in question, the Church recognizes the right of the government to make necessary regulations.

Besides being of the necessary age, the prospective spouses must not be related by blood more closely than third cousins.



However, the Church will for serious reasons grant a dispensation for first or second cousins to marry. The Church also will dispense, with reason, if the couple are related by Baptism (one the godparent of the other) or by marriage (as a widower and his sister-in-law), both of which relationships are impediments to marriage.

The laws of marriage also require that a Catholic marry a Catholic. The Church does grant, for a grave reason, a dispensation for a Catholic to marry one who is not a Catholic. In such an instance, the non-Catholic partner must give a written guarantee not to interfere with the religious faith and practice of the Catholic spouse. Both partners must give written assurance that all their children will be raised Catholics. The Catholic party must promise to work, by prayer and good example, for the conversion of the non-Catholic. Even with such safeguards, the result of a mixed marriage often is the weakening or loss of faith on the part of the Catholic spouse; or loss of faith on the part of children who see their parents divided on the matter of religion; or lack of complete happiness in the marriage because a basic ingredient, unity of faith, is lacking. It is with the reluctance of a Mother who has nineteen hundred years of sad experience behind her that the Church grants a dispensation for a mixed marriage.

The most essential thing to remember is that there just is no true marriage for a Catholic except "marriage by the priest," as we commonly say. A Catholic married by the judge or minister is not really married at all — not in the eyes of God, who is the One who counts. A Catholic living in such a union is living in the state of habitual sin, regardless of the outward respectability which the civil law may accord.

**Discussion:** 1. What is it important for us to remember regarding the Church's laws regulating Matrimony? 2. What is the basic law governing the sacrament of Matrimony? 3. What priest may administer the sacrament of Matrimony to any particular couple? 4. Why do Catholics seldom marry during Lent or Advent? 5. What is the minimum age at which the sacrament of Matrimony may be received? 6. What kinds of

relationship are impediments to Matrimony? 7. To obtain a dispensation for a mixed marriage what must the couple promise? 8. For a Catholic, what is the most essential thing to remember regarding marriage?

#### MY APOSTOLATE:

1. I shall give the same wholehearted obedience to the laws of Christ's Church as I give to the Ten Commandments.
2. If a homemaker, I shall help my family to feel the spirit of the holydays by making the main family meal on those days a festive occasion.
3. If single, I shall guarantee myself a Catholic marriage by dating only Catholic companions. If a parent, I shall encourage my grown children to date only Catholic companions, since that is the one certain guarantee of a Catholic marriage.





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