

RCIA CLASS 20 - THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AND DUTIES TO GOD.

I. The Ten Commandments are listed twice in the Bible, and are calls to be God's chosen people.

A. Moses gave the Ten Commandments at least twice, once at Mount Sinai and once when the Chosen People were about to enter the Promised Land. See Ex. 20:2-17; Duet. 5:6-21 The two different versions come from the slightly different lists on those two occasions.

- Emphasizing the need to avoid idolatry, the first version has the first two commandments on that point, the first one prohibiting other gods, and the second one prohibiting the making of graven idols. It has one commandment at the end prohibiting envy.
- Emphasizing the willingness to respect others even in thought, the second version has two commandments as the end prohibiting envy and combines the commandments at the beginning against idols and graven images.
- The Catholic Church has historically used the second version; most Protestants and Orthodox use the first version.

B. The Ten Commandments focus on justice and a call to freedom from desires.

- The Ten Commandments present the most basic principles about a just and fair society. The first three Commandments refers to justice to God, the Fourth Commandment refers to justice within a family, the next three commandments refer to justice towards others in action, and the final two refer to justice in thought.
- The principles behind all of these commandments are a matter of natural law, discernable by anyone with reason, even had there been no revelation. Here revelation strengthens reason and clarifies it (e.g. by letting us know God's name, by revealing the Sabbath Day, etc.) See Catechism 2070-71.
- Both versions of the Ten Commandments begin by recounting that God brought His people out of slavery in Egypt. The idea is that God has liberated them to be His People and is now giving instructions about how to remain His People and never again fall under the domination of foreign powers, whether other nations or sins.

C. The Ten Commandments are the beginning of a life of holiness, but not the end. See Mark 10:17-31.

- The Beatitudes and the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit build upon the Commandments and bring them more to the heights of sanctity. See, e.g., Matt. 5:2-12; Mark 8:34-38; Gal. 5:22-23.

II. The First Commandment expresses the controlling principle of a godly life, i.e. honoring God as God and not having other gods.

A. All people have a natural understanding that they should worship God (or whatever holy that they believe in.) This natural understanding is called the virtue of religion, and is a part of justice. See Vatican II Council, Notrae Aetate (Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions) 2; St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica II-II q. 81. art. 1-5. The first and highest duty of the human person is to seek the truth about God and adhere to it once found. See Vatican II Council, Dignitatis Humanae (Decree on Religious Liberty) 3.

B. Now that God has revealed Himself to us, we have a deeper calling to render Him the worship due to Him, and to enter into the friendship he calls us to. Faith, hope and charity are the primary virtues that define this relationship. See Rom. 5:1-5; 1 Cor. 13:13; Col. 1:3-7; 1 Thess. 1:2-4, 5:8.

- Faith is the personal trust we have in God and, by extension, in all that He reveals by Scriptures and the Church. It uses reason, but is not bound by reason, for it goes to things unseen by the mind. See Heb. 11:1. Faith deals more with the intellect, but it must involve the will and one's hopes in order for it to be effective. "Faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead." James 2:17.

- Hope is the trust we place in God that He will work with us for our salvation and will make all things work out for our good and the good of the Church. See Rom. 8:28. It does not inherently involve a belief that things will get better on earth, but rather that God guides His Church to proclaim the Gospel through all time and space and will guide each person to salvation if he is willing. See, e.g., Matt. 16:13-23, 28:16-20; John 16:33.

- Charity is that perfect love God has for us and the love we are meant to show to others for God's sake. See, e.g., John 13:31-35; 1 John 4:7-21. It searches for the goodness God has given to each person and longs to bring it out.

C. Sins against this commandment are either a refusal to decide to worship anything or the worship of false gods.

1. Such things as voluntary doubt, irreverence, indifference and the like are sins that involve the refusal to commit to anything. A person wants to be his own god. This path is a path of self-delusion, for none of us can be his own master in control of all things, and is in the end subject to death, which without Christ is the master of us all. See Rom. 6.

- Even when one thinks he is acting entirely without constraint, he is governed by his own desires, and is thus a slave of them. See, e.g., John 8:31-38.

- Honest doubts in themselves are not sinful, but call one to search for the truth all the more, as occurred with Nathaniel and, it appears, Nicodemus. See John 2:43-51, 3:1-21. Likewise, the emotion of doubt and difficulties in understanding are not themselves sinful unless invited, but rather are often challenges to engage the heart and mind more into our relationship with God.

2. The other side of sins against the first commandment is the worship of false gods. In an older era (and in some New Age religions) this worship was of a named god, e.g., Baal, Zeus, Apollo, etc. More often now it is the worship of things, e.g., money, physical desires, popular opinion, the state, celebrities, etc. See Col. 3:5. If someone cares more about any such things than God (e.g., forming one's values by popular culture or entertainment rather than the Bible), such things have become a god.

- People may also have a false notion of the true God, thinking for example, that He is bound by superstitious practices (e.g., must grant a request if one prays a certain prayer) or that He does not care about minor human affairs.

D. Freedom of religions is important precisely because we have an obligation to search out for God and, having found Him, freely to choose to worship Him. The right and the responsibility are bound together. See Catechism 2108.

E. Art and other forms of culture, both sacred and secular, are meant to show invisible truths in visible form, often in a manner that cannot be expressed verbally. True beauty points to a reality beyond itself. John Paul II, Letter to Artists (1993.)

III. The Second Commandment reflects the glory and power of God's name.

A. We cannot have a personal friendship with anyone without knowing his name. And so God reveals to us His name. In the Old Covenant, God revealed His name in part (e.g., "I am who am," "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob," "El Shaddai", which means "God Almighty." See, e.g., Gen. 17:1; Ex. 3:6, 13. Jesus Christ, the "Word of God" came and revealed God even more personally, through Himself and with the name "Father, Son and Holy Spirit" that we may be united with Him. See, e.g., Matt. 28:28; Phil 2:9-10; Rev. 19:13.

- The ancient Jews recognized the power of God's name, for it was at the core of their relationship with Him. See, e.g., Ps. 72:19, 124:8; 135:1; Joel 3:5.
- The name of Jesus then confers great power upon the early Christians, for it expresses their friendship with Jesus. See, e.g., Luke 10:72; Acts 3:6. The name of Jesus is so powerful that the opponents of the Christians want to forbid even pronouncing it. See Acts 5:40-42.
- Jesus promised that prayers offered in His name, i.e. in the midst of our relationship with Him, would be very powerful. See, e.g., Matt. 18:20; John 15:26, 16:24.

B. Thus, the name of God is to be treated with great reverence and respect as His great and powerful gift to us, as expressing in verbal form His inexpressible love for us.

- We rightfully invoke God's name in prayer and in witnessing to the truth. His name is most powerful in the sacraments, which begin and end by an invocation of the Trinity.
- Oaths (e.g., in trials and in taking a high office) using God's name can be taken if the matter is grave enough to warrant calling upon Him. Trivial using of oaths is very wrong, both because it trivializes oaths and is a temptation to perjury.
- Sins against the name of Jesus include blasphemy (i.e. using God's name for a negative or unfitting reason, false oaths, breaking solemn promises.)

IV. The Third Commandment is meant to protect one day a week at least for God and for all of the higher things in life.

A. Moses gave two explanations for the Third Commandment, which give the general background for it.

- In the first version, Moses explained that the Sabbath is important because it recalls the primordial order of creation. The idea is that we need at least one day a week to recall the origin and goal of all things, the glory of God.
- In the second version, Moses reminded the people that they were slaves in Egypt. The idea is that they should never again be slaves to commerce, business, politics, etc., that they cannot even take one day a week off.

B. The Sabbath day has been moved from Saturday for the Jews to Sunday for Christians.

- The Jews have Saturday as their Sabbath, reflecting the order of creation. We moved the Sabbath to Sunday, reflecting the Resurrection and completion of the old order and beginning of the new creation that will lead to the eternal Sabbath.

C. Positively, the Third Commandment calls for attendance of Mass on Sunday (or Saturday evening), prayerfulness and charity on Sunday, and use of the day for the building up of the Church, society and human nature.

- Rest is a part of the Sabbath, but not as a burden, but rather as a part of a renewal and restoration of human affairs. Thus, far from contradicting the Sabbath, works of charity add to it. See, e.g., Matt. 12:9-14; Mark 3:1-6.

- Deliberately missing Mass on Sunday without a serious reason is a grave sin because it expresses a lack of concern about our relationship with Jesus and His Church. See Catechism 2181; Pope John Paul II, Dies Domini (1998) 47. All pastors, and all priests of this and most American dioceses, have the authority to replace the Sunday obligation with another pious devotion if necessary on a case by case basis.

D. People should avoid unnecessary business and ordinary labor and commercial transactions on the Sabbath so that the day can be dedicated more to the Lord.