

The Ten Commandments Friday, January 23, 2009 7:30 PM St. Francis of Assisi
Parish Adult Formation

I ask you to join with me in prayer: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Heavenly Father, we ask that you give us all a heart that is open to your wisdom and to your Holy Spirit, so we can understand with your knowledge what it is that we need to know about your love and your law and your way of life. We ask this through Christ Our Lord. Amen.

Now, of course, the problem with such a topic is—the Ten Commandments—is simply such a rich topic; it contains so much that what I can do in one evening is only a brief survey. Nonetheless, I think it could be worthwhile.

First of all, the word is “**Decalogue**.” It really means “**the ten words**.” Why? Because there are not ten commandments in the original Hebrew. There are only two commandments; the rest are prohibitions. So the “Decalogue,” however, means “the ten words.”

What is the origin of these? What is the origin of the ten words? Well, actually we don’t know for sure. If you saw *The Ten Commandments* by Cecil B. DeMille, forget it! That’s not how it happened—that’s not how it happened. The actual history is buried, but **we have stories**, and the stories tell us truth about—not necessarily what happened, but how people responded. **That’s what the Bible tells us: how people responded to God’s approach.**

So we have the story of the **Exodus**, about how **a people enslaved were led out through the power of God**—God’s outstretched hand helped them, freed them, liberated them for life with God. And they formed with God a **covenant**. Now what’s a covenant? Again, we are not sure exactly what it is. It’s a sort of **agreement or contract between two unequal parties**.

Now what was unusual about this particular contract or covenant is that in this case **God served as both Lord and King**. Now in the ancient Near East, religion and politics were very connected. What was different about the covenant with Israel is God did not appoint the king to represent him but, rather, dealt directly with the people through their own ability to foresee and **relate to him in a personal relationship**, mediated at first through Moses, and later through other prophets. If you think about it, this was a unique political experiment. It amounted to almost a democracy, with this stipulation, that God set the constitution. **God laid down the minimal constitutional rules or laws that would govern this relationship.**

Now there were not only ten laws in Israel. There were many, many laws, and they grew gradually, as laws grow through case decisions. And some of this case law is contained in the Old Testament in various books—**there are six hundred and thirteen written laws in the Old Testament.**

Now what is important about **the ten words is that they were the capital, constitutional laws that obedience to which was required in order to be part of the covenant. So, in principle, the violation of any one of them required death as a penalty.** Some people say, well, in the Old Testament God said ‘Eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth.’” No, that was a modification pertaining to case law or what we might call civil law. The actual ten words required death for the violation of any commandment. So they had to think about these in terms of a minimal interpretation of what is included. All criminal laws are minimalistic. If you are arrested and you go to court, the prosecutor has to prove that you really did exactly what the law forbids. There can’t be any gray area or else you get off. So it was with the ten words, with the Decalogue. **It had to be provable that someone violated these commandments. So they had to be very external, therefore, not abstract principles, as they became in Christianity.** But in the original covenant they were actual laws that had to be proved in some kind of court.

Now in regard to the First Commandment: “Thou shall have no strange gods before me,” the punishment there is not only the offender but the offender’s life to the third and fourth generation. So worshipping a false god was equivalent to setting up a relationship with a rival, not only a rival god, but a rival state because politics and religion were always mixed. So all the gods of the pantheons of the ancient world were always connected to a particular culture, a particular state, a particular political structure. So **worshipping a false god was also aligning oneself to another state or another power in a spiritual sense**, such as later is called the “devil” or “Satan.” So they didn’t fool around with people like that. **They wiped out the whole family to the third and fourth generation.** This was, of course, to discourage this type of infidelity.

But that brings up another very important concept: the **“Vengeance of Yahweh.”** There would have been no covenant without the idea that the individual members and families and tribes of this covenant had to surrender to God their right to avenge themselves. That’s very basic to the idea of the covenant. In other words, **God had a moral monopoly on force.** Is that not what every state tries to do, to create a moral monopoly on the use of force? So the state can do what others cannot do. You cannot avenge yourself, but you can go to a court and find some sort of justification or some sort of adjudication of your various problems. Of course in our country, we have two different court systems: civil and criminal. The Decalogue concerns strictly criminal procedure.

Now I will just pass over very quickly what the original commandments were about, or original words.

First of all, **worshipping God and only God and having no false gods and, therefore, no ties to other groups, cultures, states, nations, or cities.**

Second of all, keeping holy the name of God. **The name of God, “Yahweh,” is a holy name and therefore has a holy power.** It was proper and correct to use that name only at certain times by certain people, namely, the priests. When called for, the priest was supposed to bring a blessing or a curse using the name, “Yahweh.” No one else could use it. Any other usage was a violation of the second commandment.

Third, **the holiness of the Lord's day and the needed rest.** That had nothing to do with religious practice. It had nothing to do with going to a synagogue or a temple or even praying. In itself it had to do with **not working.**

Fourth, honoring your father and mother meant that as adults—and a boy became an adult at sixteen years old, and up until the sixth century BC girls never became adult; women were not considered adults until the sixth century in the reform of Josiah. In the early code only males were adults, and only they were subject to the law. So the law of the Fourth Commandment was that **all boys as they became men had to follow in the steps of their parents. That meant politically, religiously, culturally—in every way.** They had to follow the ways of their parents. Ordinarily families lived in groups—not nuclear families like just mom and dad and children, but usually whole large families under the eldest male, who would then be in charge of the whole thing. Honor thy father and mother had to do with that system in keeping it in place.

Fifth, do not kill really meant **do not take the life of a fellow Israelite.** This does not mean that they had a license to kill anyone else they wanted, but that other forms of killing were dealt with under other forms of law: case law, law suits, you could say tort law in some cases, but not this particular law. Only the killing of a fellow Israelite was covered in the original idea of the Fifth Commandment.

The Sixth Commandment originally meant that **no Israelite could take another Israelite's wife for himself or render his bloodline impure by introducing his own blood into it.** So that's where the idea of purity originally came from.

The Seventh Commandment **had to do with stealing, but it's not so clear exactly what the object was** because there is a lot of case law about stealing. For example, if you stole a goat, you would have to pay back a goat and two more goats. So that wouldn't be part of this. Under what condition, under what situation, would death be required for stealing? That's an open question. **It's believed by some that this has to do with stealing slaves or houses,** taking possession of a whole house, for example. If you remember the story of Naboth's vineyard in the Book of Kings, how the king, Jezebel's husband, Ahab, wanted Naboth's vineyard. Now that wanting Naboth's vineyard is probably what has been translated as **coveted, so that would actually be the Ninth and Tenth commandments.** So he wanted it, but he took steps to defraud Naboth of this, well Jezebel actually did. He didn't do anything. He just went home and cried. Jezebel says, "Well, some fine king you are. Watch me. I'll get it for you." So that is probably what is meant by coveting, although the word in Hebrew doesn't mean anything more than to covet or desire strongly. But apparently more than that was necessary for it to be something that you could accuse somebody of in a court and prove. Of course, in the case of Ahab, God knew about it, and God said, "I will avenge this crime." But God didn't always do that directly. So the Seventh Commandment—it's somewhat questionable about what the object of it was.

The Eighth Commandment had to do with **perjury.** Because this whole system depends on people speaking truthfully in court about what they have observed someone doing, so **if you witness falsely, you are going to cause someone's death.** That was the Eighth.

The Ninth and the Tenth have to do with **keeping your eyes off other people's possessions**. But it had to be more than that, but we don't know exactly what more. It had to have something to do with **plotting to get hold of other people's possessions somehow**.

So that's the background. I'm not going to spend much time on it because in the practice of Christian life that background doesn't have a whole lot of relevance to the way the Decalogue has been interpreted in the Christian Church. This is for two reasons. The first reason has to do with the death of Christ. Now you have to keep in mind that the Church really didn't exist before the death of Christ. Jesus gathered apostles. He gathered disciples, but they really weren't Church yet. **The Church was born in the death and resurrection of Christ**. St. John says that on the cross **blood and water flowed from the side of Christ**. He means the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist. So we are constituted as Christians through the sacrament of Baptism. So before the death of Christ there really was no Church. When, however, the Church was formed through this experience of the death and resurrection of Christ, **the understanding that the early Church had of the death of Christ was an atonement**. The death of Jesus was an atonement.

Now prior to the atonement by Christ, **sin was seen as a sort of contagion** that would insinuate itself into a community and spread like, for example, cancer. Cancer can spread through a body or bacteria can spread through, let's say, pneumonia can spread through the lungs and overwhelm an organism. **That is why they practiced capital punishment**. They had to get rid of this contagion; they had to get rid of this malignancy; at least that's how they looked at it. **But with the blood of Christ atoning for sin** and for all sin, once and for all and totally, that was no longer necessary. The stain of sin was removed. So the **Church did not have to worry about sin in its midst**. It didn't have to be happy about it. It could observe the people were not yet perfect, but it didn't have to worry about the vengeance of Yahweh. **The vengeance of Yahweh has been nullified in the blood of the atonement**. So from the very beginning **the Church then looked at law in a very different way**. That's the first reason.

The second good reason is **Jesus looked at law in a very different way**. The reason why Judaism and Christianity are two separate religions is that Jesus simply did not agree with the way the Jewish teachers taught about law. For one thing, Jesus believed himself to be **knowledgeable about the Lawgiver**. He speaks of the Father as someone he knows personally, and therefore **he interprets the Father's will**.

Now this struck Jewish people as arrogant because they believed in the law as they had been taught it. During the time of the **exile** the Jewish religion underwent a tremendous radical transformation. They were uprooted from Israel, and made to live in Babylon, modern-day Iraq. One of the elements that arose at that time was a new class of people or servants or teachers called "rabbis." **The rabbis had the role of teaching the law**. Only they said there were two parts of the law: the **written law** found in the Bible and then the **oral law that they said came from God through Moses and then on to them as teachers**.

Jesus himself did not believe this. This is one of the principal bones of contention that separate him from his other rabbinic individuals or teachers at that time. For example, he says, “They nullify the law of God and replace it with mere human tradition.” Well, according to them, it wasn’t mere human tradition; it was the law of God. It was just an oral form of it, and they called it “Torah.” That means the “instruction.” So **they called both of these “Torah.”** The word “law” wasn’t used until the Greek Septuagint—*nomos*, in Greek. But in Hebrew it’s “Torah.” Both were called “Torah.” Eventually the oral law was written down, and that became the Halakhah, which is the first part of the Talmud. Now Jesus simply did not believe in the Halakhah. That’s what he called “a mere human tradition.” St. Paul originally did believe in it, but then he changed that belief when he converted to Christ, when he realized that Christ really was from God he gave up his belief in the Halakhah. So that’s what you actually see in the original handwritten Talmud: it had a text and then around the text you had the Halakhah or interpretation. You call that “building a fence around the Torah.” Out of that came all these questions that are often the basis of these disputes that you read about in the New Testament, because **they constantly argue this, and there were different rabbis with different opinions.** But they all agreed on one thing, that these laws came from God. It’s just they had to interpret them.

So **the early Church did not believe in this whole tradition.** So obviously that was the point of great contention. **But they did have this belief in the Holy Spirit as their teacher.** So what they lost in one way they replaced with the Holy Spirit. The role of the Holy Spirit was to teach them everything Jesus had said insofar as it is needed, that they needed to know. So the Church also had an oral tradition, but it was different. It was based on the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It was not based on something that was handed down from the time of Moses. **The tradition that the apostles and that the early Church had concerning the Law, the Ten Commandments, for example, was very different from the interpretation of the Jews at that time.**

First of all, Jesus had always moved things into the inside, into the interior. For example, “The Law says, ‘Do not kill.’ I say anyone who is angry is already guilty of murder.” You see, it’s a **shift inward to the motivation factory of the human emotions.** “The law says, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ I say any man who looks with lust upon a woman has already committed adultery.” Shifting inside into the soul, into the factory, the motivational factory we call our emotions and our affective life and our sexuality, moving into that.

So Jesus was always moving inward. He spoke about **the danger of the letter of the law but the freedom of the spirit of the law.** He also said that the entire Law and the prophets were **all contained in two laws**, neither of which he made up, both of which are part of the six hundred thirteen laws. The first is Deuteronomy 6: “Love the Lord, your God, with your whole mind, your whole heart, and your whole soul”—that’s the first one. And then the second is from Leviticus 19: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Both those were already in this whole mix, but they weren’t prominent. They weren’t hinges upon which you could hang everything else, but that’s what Jesus said. Those two laws are hinges upon which all the teachings of the Torah and the prophets can be hinged.

Now actually what we call **the Ten Commandments did not become central to the Christian catechesis until the time of St. Augustine.** They were in use, but they weren't central. St. Augustine is the one who chose to focus on this particular way of presenting, you might say, a framework in which to understand moral life. First and foremost, however, in the Christian sense there really are not truly ten commandments. They take on a very positive force. It is **no longer simply prohibitions. They are positive forces in the life of the Christian.** Therefore now there is a **new possibility of sins of omission**, a failure to follow the positive force implied in the commandments understood in the Christian Church or from the Christian point of view.

So the **First Commandment** now is not only to avoid worshipping false gods, which remains, but now it's a **command to worship God, which implies a search.** When Jesus says search and you will find he is not making a suggestion. He is saying that the human being must search, and if the human being does not search, the human being will be lost. So this is really **a commandment now, not a prohibition. It's a requirement to search for the truth that has created everything,** holds everything in being, sets it forth according to its providence, and desires for us to join with him in communion. Therefore, **it also requires that we believe and trust in this God.**

I am sure you know that faith is a virtue, which is a gift from God and grace. Yes, the assumption then is that God will require, but **give the power to do whatever is needed for our growth.** The whole idea that started with Christianity is that the ordinary person, the ordinary man, so to speak, called "carnal man," or the "flesh," is not sufficient. It's actually a rundown organism that lacks the vitality and the substance that God originally intended. Part of Jesus' whole mission was always to get back to the original idea. In discussing divorce he says, "In the beginning." That's typical—to get back to what God originally intended. Well, what God originally intended for human beings is a life full of spirit, not just managing to get through life, not just reacting to the surroundings, not just giving into like or dislike and being driven by passion. That isn't what God intended. That's a broken-down machine. **So what God now is requiring is that people really allow for a complete makeover, a substantial, spiritual, psychological, and even physical makeover that begins with faith.** That, of course, leads to hope because hope is a necessary ingredient in a conscious life that can see that everything isn't right now. **So a life that is directed in an intelligent and sober way toward the future requires hope.**

And, of course, love—faith, hope, and love really also involves that God, the true God—see, we are talking about the First Commandment—no strange gods—the true God is wholly and totally loving and good. There is no evil. There is no shadow in God, not the true God. If your idea of God is full of shadow, or if you are wondering if God really loves you or not, you don't have a true God in your mind. Ultimately **if people respond to God primarily out of fear, that's really not the true God they are responding to.** It's an idea they have or a feeling that isn't quite right. Although "Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," but that's talking about reverence. It's not fear of punishment. Fear of punishment would be inappropriate for anyone who believed in the atonement wrought by the blood of Jesus. **So God is the source of all good and is infinitely good and beneficent and benevolent.**

Faith then must be nurtured and protected. As St. Paul says in Romans, ignorance of God is the source of all moral deviations. Well, if ignorance of God is a source of all moral deviations, then we have to learn about God. St. Jerome said, “Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ.” But how do we know God except through Christ because Christ is the Word sent to us to share our human life with us? Hope then is looking forward with confidence to the fulfillment of God’s promises. **As faith can perceive that God is doing something, hope sees it as fulfilled.** Naturally faith then calls on us to respond to God, who is love, in like, to respond to God’s benevolence in like kind, in like manner. This is the gift of God for God enables us to do what he requires. So **God gives us the power to do what is good for us.** Without God we can’t do it, but it will never be lacking, since God’s benevolence is infinite. So **we have a duty to seek, but we also have a right of conscience.**

Now **the right of conscience is originally understood as freedom from coercion.** It actually doesn’t mean the right to do whatever you think is right. Originally it meant freedom from coercion, that no one can force someone to do something that they believe is wrong. That’s what actually the right of conscience originally meant. That’s still basically what the Church teaches that means. That leads to religious liberty that John Paul II said is the most important of all liberties because **if you respect a person’s religious liberty, you are going to respect the person; and that’s the beginning of Christian humanism.**

It sees that there are some very serious problems in human life, in human experience. One of them is, although people may laugh at this, but there is a very serious problem with superstition. Superstition comes from the word “to put above” or “to place above.” **Superstition is any way in which we put the wrong emphasis on something, and actually we do that all the time.** For example, in our faith there are all kinds of things: some are very important; some are not so important. But if we think what is not so important is really important, then that’s superstitious. It doesn’t even have to be evil. It’s just wrong. **And it can lead us away from where God wants us.**

Next to superstition is another very serious problem, and that is the problem of the demonic. **People get involved in the demonic, especially if they have connections to so-called “natural religions” or folk religions or animism or shamanism.** Now a lot of these things today are touted by our universities and anthropology departments as just wonderful phenomena, but they are actually not. They can be forms of deception that **lead people away** from the true God and the true faith that God has in mind for us. For some people **race or money becomes a matter of idolatry.** Look at what has happened in the international financial system. What caused that? Love of money. St. Paul says the root of all evil. It becomes idolatry. **Pleasure**—in some philosophies **the state** becomes for all intents and purposes the greatest good. If the state is the greatest good, then that’s worshipping the state. Actually that was not so uncommon in the ancient world. For all intents and purposes if you look at Babylonia, Babylonia was ruled by the representative of a god, so what people worship was, in a sense, the state of Babylon represented in the king, who was allegedly appointed by this god. Other forms of idolatry involve **divination.** Now today on television you see a lot of these shows talking about superstitious, preternatural and superhuman forces, which are presented very often in

attractive ways, where in fact they should be presented as dangerous forces because they are.

Tempting God—remember Jesus was on the parapet of the temple, and the devil said, “Well, if you are really the Son of God, throw yourself down.” What is that sort of temptation? It’s a **temptation to make God prove something**. Prove to me that you really love me. I’ll wait here until you do what I want. Now Gideon, if you remember, asked for signs. He said, “God, if you are really calling me to do this, well, then make sure that the fleece is wet when everything else is dry, or it is dry when everything else is wet.” He was seeking clarity. But we can tempt God by requiring God to care for us after we have thrown away all care and concern for ourselves.

Sacrilege, atheism—**atheism is a form of idolatry**, where in a sense the ego becomes the highest good. **I am the highest good since there is no God**. What’s left? Me. **Agnosticism** can be also, and so on.

Okay, we will move on to the **Second Commandment. It has to do with respecting the sacred**. Again, another commandment, not a prohibition—respecting the sacred. Now I want to read for you for just one minute from John Henry Newman quoted in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. He says this, speaking of the sense of the sacred he says:

“Are these feelings of fear and awe Christian feelings or not? . . . I say this, then, which I think no one can reasonably dispute. They are the class of feelings we *should* have—yes, have to an intense degree—if we literally had the sight of Almighty God; therefore they are the class of feelings which we shall have, *if* we realize His presence. In proportion as we believe that He is present, we shall have them; and not to have them, is not to realize, not to believe that He is present.”¹

There are certain feelings related to the sacred that are actually necessary for our growth. There are some feelings that are evil or at least can lead to evil. There are other feelings that are holy; they lead to God.

Now the positive demands on all human persons to seek the truth, who is God, also has a counterpart in the secular world. And that is what the Eighth Commandment is talking about. So I am jumping now to the **Eighth Commandment** because it’s the same idea: **seek the truth; speak the truth; share the truth; witness to the truth, but even in secular matters**. So “the truth is one,” the philosophers say. So when we are truthful, we are witnesses to God. So the **First Commandment, the Second Commandment, and the Eighth Commandment** are all connected in this way. They have to do with our **responsibility to seek the truth, to speak the truth, to share the truth, not to be deceived, not to be quiet when it is inappropriate**. It includes, of course, in terms of the Eighth Commandment how we deal with people, ordinary people in everyday matters—**not jumping to conclusions, not being rash in our judgment about them**. Since the First Commandment requires love of God and love of neighbor, which cannot be separated—Jesus taught that—so if we love people, we don’t judge them rashly. We try to find a **favorable way of explaining whatever they did or said**. That has to become an attitude we take on. **It is an attitude of charity**, but it relates directly to the truth. We are

not truthful when we are always seeing everything negatively, when we see everyone is wrong and we are constantly being critical and sarcastic. That is not loving the truth because it isn't loving anything. It's not loving. We can only see externals. Now for the original Decalogue that was enough, but not for the Christian understanding of the commandments or of the **moral commandment, which is a natural extension of faith, hope and love.**

Third Commandment. Now the Third Commandment had to do with rest. **"Sabbath" is rest.** Now practically speaking, it is a very good idea that you take some time off. (*tape turned*) That became a major mark of Jewish life, that and the circumcision, because it was so unusual, and it became really important—maybe too important. If you notice, **Jesus is constantly healing on the sabbath.** Is that because he took off six days a week and just worked on the sabbath? We see it's because—well, there are lots of different ways of putting this—**God isn't resting anymore because now God sees a world that needs help.**

Just as Jesus admired the Good Samaritan, even though he violated the laws, which the priests follow. You see, the priests were supposed to avoid dead bodies or blood, so they did. The **Good Samaritan** didn't. But he is held up as a great example, being a neighbor, of **actually following the Law in its inner meaning.** But that reflects also God's attitude. **God is the Good Samaritan, not so much caring about these external things, but going to help. So Jesus is always healing on the sabbath.**

But also there is another point, that **the sabbath law does not require refraining from doing things pleasurable.** But Jesus loved healing people. The Pharisees and the rabbis were upset with him because they only saw work. They looked at these healings negatively. Jesus looked at them in a different way. They were play. They were fun. They were pleasurable. There is no law against having pleasure on the sabbath.

Now for the Christian, of course, the idea of sabbath is really transformed now because **Jesus is the sabbath. He is the Sabbath of sabbaths.** If you follow the logic of Matthew's Gospel, there are fourteen generations, fourteen generations, and fourteen generations, and that leads all the way up to forty-eight generations. Jesus is the forty-ninth—seven times seven, the Sabbath of sabbaths. So he is the rest—the rest of God, and **he becomes the rest of God primarily in his resurrection from the dead,** because now, in a sense, **now the creation is complete.** It wasn't complete before because the glory of God had not been manifested, because the eternal life of God hadn't entered into the creation. God was always eternal, but it hadn't entered into the creation. Now in the resurrection the eternal life enters into the creation, and that is the rest, and so **the day of the resurrection becomes the day of rest for the Christians.**

What does that mean? Well, it means that **we should relax,** that we should **cultivate familial, cultural, social, and our religious lives.** It doesn't simply mean to get to church on Sunday; be sure to go to church; get that done. The whole day belongs to the resurrection and to the higher aspects of our life and to our needs for leisure and for education, for relaxation, for cultural improvement, anything that is beneficial. But, of course, **coming to Eucharist is also important.** It has been from the very earliest days.

You could read that also in the Catechism. There is a quotation from St. John Chrysostom.

“You cannot pray at home as at church, where there is a great multitude, where exclamations are cried out to God as from one great heart”—of course, his church had charismatics in it, so according to him, we are supposed to be crying out—“and where there is something more: the union of minds, the accord of souls, the bond of charity, the prayers of the priests.”²

So **we have to think more richly about what liturgy is**. It’s not just going somewhere, attending something. You see, it’s **a rich sharing in the lives of other believers**. So we gather on Sunday—gathering—even if we have no priest, we could gather and meet together.

With the **Fourth Commandment** we come to a shift, not so much concern directly with God and the consequences of that, but now **our relationship with others**. This commandment, even in the original, comes with a promise. “Honor your father and your mother, and you will have a long life. Now the Church understands that **parents are intermediaries in bringing life to earth. Their authority is limited only by the rights of their children**. The state cannot limit the authority of parents. The Church cannot limit the authority of parents. Only the rights of children can limit the authority of parents. You understand that? Parents are for all intents and purposes in the place of God for their children. The family is the central organism of society and of the Church. Now I quote from the Catechism: “This commandment includes and presupposes the duties of parents,” and “instructors, teachers, leaders, magistrates, those who govern,” and “all who exercise authority over others or over a community of persons.”³ In other words, **since the family is the basic unit, then what applies to the family applies to all the other units**. The centrality of the family: the state does not create its rights or duties; it should recognize them.

In terms of the Church, the early Fathers called the **family the “domestic church.”** It’s a community of faith—it should be a community of faith; that’s where the faith could be planted and nurtured—and hope and charity and prayer and sacrifice, and so on and so on. That’s a school, as Pope Paul VI used to talk about the “School of Nazareth.” He meant the Holy Family. Well, **all of our families should be schools where we learn how to do all these things: how to pray with others, sacrifice for others, surrender to love**.

The family is a model for society on a whole and this serves as the foundation for social justice. The Church’s Social Justice doctrines are based on the Fourth Commandment understood in the Christian tradition. The care and education that parents owe their children, the whole of the society owes to those children whose families fail them. That’s the logic of the Church’s Social Teaching. Not every family can be all it has to be for its children, and so something bigger, **a bigger family—that’s what societies should be**—needs to care for those who cannot find any other form of caring. The same is true for respect for elders. The family should care for its own elders, but when it can’t, then society needs to care for them. This is not an unjust imposition. This is part of God’s basic law for good life—“and you will have long life.”

There is a **summary of parental responsibilities**, which I would like to read.

“Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. They bear witness to this responsibility first by *creating a home* where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and disinterested service are the rule. The home is well suited for *education in the virtues*. This requires an apprenticeship in self-denial, sound judgment, and self-mastery—the preconditions of all true freedom. Parents should teach their children to subordinate the ‘material and instinctual dimensions to interior and spiritual ones.’⁴ Parents have the grave responsibility to give good example to their children. By knowing how to acknowledge their own failings to their children, parents will be better able to guide and correct them.”⁵

Fifth Commandment has to do with the sacredness of all life. This brings into question the issue of the **death penalty**. This is where we started in the Decalogue. Every single commandment involved the death penalty.

Now for years the Christian culture passed on the idea of more or less a covenant idea that the society played an intermediary role in mediating the relationship of the citizen to God, and it followed from the idea of the family. Since God had said in the Old Testament that life for a life, for example, they reasoned that it was legitimate for a Christian state to put to death someone who had taken another life. They said this restored the balance of justice. It meted out necessary punishment, and possibly prevented further forms of murder. Well, that was the thinking up until the 1920’s when/with **Edith Stein, who later became Sister Teresa Benedicta**. She died at Auschwitz; you may have heard her story. Pope John Paul beautified her. She was studying philosophy and writing philosophy, and **she came to the conclusion that modern states could not put to death their citizens because modern states had no relationship to God**. She read constitutions, even the United States Constitution. There is no mention of God in there. There is a mention of God in the Declaration of Independence, but not the Constitution. So she reasoned that modern states are **simply collections of individuals, and they cannot mediate divine punishment**. Since as an individual I cannot kill you if you killed my mother, well, then the state can’t either. That was her reasoning. So that started changing things.

Now the Fifth Commandment, of course, **condemns all direct killing and indirect killing through non-action**—so two things: direct killing and indirect killing through non-action—in other words, you can save someone, but you don’t do anything. That is forbidden. You have to do something if you can. **Unintentional killing**—now this is a little bit hard to understand—is not imputable—it means **you are not responsible for it unless something you do brings about the killing of someone without a proportionate reason**. Now what is that? I can’t answer that before 10:30. But anyway, you can look it up and read and study this for yourself if you are interested in this. **It comes into play often with caring for the ill**. You can’t directly kill people who are ill, but by giving them certain treatments you actually shorten their life, but you may be justified in doing that or you may not be, and that’s something you have to figure out. That’s what proportional reasoning is.

Now, of course, **abortion, direct killing of the child in the womb, is always forbidden. Exploitation of embryos, the creation of embryos for commercial reasons is strictly forbidden.**

Euthanasia. Now it is permitted to discontinue “**medical procedures that are burdensome, dangerous, extraordinary, or disproportionate to the expected outcome.**”⁶ That’s what the catechism says. And the **decision should be made by the patient if possible, if not, by a guardian the patient has designated.** Pain killers, which may shorten life, may be used to alleviate suffering, but not to shorten life. So sometimes something we do might have double effect.

Suicide is always forbidden, never justifiable. However, it is often believed that people who kill themselves are disturbed, at least at the moment they do it. So while the Church teaches that suicide is always wrong, it’s very merciful about caring for the family because the great probability is that the person wasn’t fully rationally connected at that moment.

Now actually the Fifth Commandment also condemns **scandal.** Now scandal does not mean shock. People say, “Oh, I was scandalized.” No, you weren’t. Scandal means no shock. **Scandal means you are led to think something is the way it should be, and then you follow suit. That can lead to spiritual death, so it’s killing.**

It requires, of course, respect for health, but not necessarily what people today do for health. I mean, that can also be turned into something somewhat perverse, almost a cult of health. No, **caring for health is absolutely required.**

It also deals with—because Jesus was always going back—**it deals with hatred, anger, and revenge.** One thing that has never changed since the first days of the covenant: “‘Vengeance is mine,’ saith the Lord.” That’s still the law of God. So vengeance and anger and wrath, that is, the desire for vengeance, is only going to lead to mischief. So we have to recognize these emotions within ourselves and find some way of offering them to the Lord and find a way to utilize their energy in a peaceful and wholesome way.

Now I don’t want to go into war right now, but I think you are aware of the **Just War Theory. It’s only a theory. It forbids killing civilians. It forbids engaging in war without sufficient cause, and so on, hope of a speedy end.**

We will go on to the **Sixth Commandment. This embraces the whole of sexuality.** Now the Bible says that God created everything and everything was good, so sexuality is part of the goodness that God has created. The complementarity between male and female is part of the wonder that God created in the beginning. In sexuality God allows the flesh itself, physical organism itself, to imitate his own generosity and fecundity because all generosity and fertility begins with God. Again Jesus sought to reestablish the original purpose of marriage so when asked about divorce he said, “In the beginning it was not so. God created man male and female.” So his understanding of the complementarity of the sexes has to do with the **original intents of God to have males and females bond together in unity and be procreative, be fertile.**

Now when sexuality is integrated, we call that “chastity.” **Chastity is integration of all the energies and passions of the body and the emotions and the mind**—integrated in a purposeful and holy way. Chastity brings about the union of the inner person and the external. So body and spirit become truly personal, truly human when integrated into the relationship of one person into another in the complete and life-long mutual gift of a man and a woman.

So the issue that this brings up is the issue of **self-mastery**. As you remember in the Fourth Commandment self-mastery was one of the agenda items for a family, but it’s a personal item as well for each individual. **Self-mastery verses allowing our passions to direct our actions.**

Now in our society apparently some people think there is nothing wrong with that, but, of course, then you are not in charge of your own life. Your life is being directed from outside. I think a great deal of the emptiness and dissatisfaction people have in life is directly due to this. There is no self-mastery. They are not at home. **They are always going from one sensation to the next.** This even **can become addictive** because no one is at home; there is no self; there is no mastery.

So we need to find ways of choosing the means that are suited for a wise and worthy end, that is, a purposeful life. We go through different stages of growth. As we move in life and make decisions—and our decisions about our sexuality are major ones—we **actually decide and determine the kind of person we become.** So people can say, “I was born this way.” Well, no, how you are **born was very undeveloped. What you are now you are because of the choices you have made.** This is true in areas of chastity and other areas as well, in fact, **in all emotional areas.** Both in marriage and outside of marriage all disciples of Christ must strive to live chaste lives, the chastity belonging to married being unitive and procreative in an exclusive way not proper to the unmarried.

There are many offenses against the dignity of marriage, chiefly **adultery and divorce.** Both violate the self-donation signified by the sexual act and the sacrament of marriage itself. However, we need to make the point that there are such things as putative marriages. **Putative marriage is a marriage when at least one of the parties thinks that they are married.** They have gone through the procedures, but they are actually not married because they lack the unity that has the Spirit as its origin. It is not wrong to dissolve the civil effects of putative marriage. That’s what you call “civil divorce.” In fact it is not only permitted, it is actually required. People should not live together who are not truly married. In such cases the Church tribunal declares a putative marriage **null from the beginning.** Like chastity itself, marriage cannot be built in a day. Some couples may start off life with good intentions and little else or nothing else. Others may lack even good intentions, or maybe one has good intentions and the other doesn’t. In this case you will never have a marriage.

Seventh Commandment. The Seventh Commandment commands justice and charity in the care of earthly goods and the fruit of man’s labor. For the sake of the common good, it requires respect for the universal destination of goods. That’s a big term. It’s very important to understand it. In Catholic theology **God created everything for the good of everyone.** We have private property for the common good. If we didn’t have private

property, things would be a big mess. Private property actually affords the care of property. But there is still universal destination of goods, which means **no one has the right to amass enormous amounts of wealth when other people are in terrible need.** Wealth brings with it responsibility. Christian life strives to order this world's goods to God and fraternal charity.

The **common stewardship of mankind:** it's a fundamental responsibility that we have to share stewardship, to recognize that **whatever we have we hold as a gift from God,** and we have to use it then for God's purposes. We do master the forces of nature by our labor and we do have a right to enjoy their fruits.

The **right of private property** does not do away with the original gift of the whole earth to the whole of mankind. And theory that makes property the exclusive end and ultimate norm of any activity is morally unacceptable.⁷

“A system that ‘subordinates the basic right of individuals and of groups to the collective organization of production’ is contrary to human dignity.⁸ Every practice that reduces persons to nothing more than a means of profit enslaves man, leads to idolizing money, and contributes to the spread of atheism. ‘You cannot serve God and mammon.’”⁹

So this paragraph **condemns both socialism in its original idea and laissez-faire capitalism.** Our need to share with the poor, govern markets wisely and demand justice in all economic matters flows from this.

And finally, the Ninth and Tenth Commandments. In the Christian tradition the **Ninth and Tenth Commandments have to do with what is called “concupiscence” or “desire.”** Now actually the word in Latin could mean simply desire, but it is used theologically to mean a desire that is out of kilter, that is unreasonable. Both the Ninth and Tenth Commandments talk about this, at least in Christian tradition. It talks about our **need to control our desires** because it's our desires that lead us on. If we don't have control, if we don't have awareness of what we are desiring, if we think whatever we desire is fine, just go with it, we cannot lead a spiritual life. So when we allow our desires to simply go, that means we are giving free range to our sensitive appetites. We cannot achieve integrity because it breaks down the relationship between our outer self and our reason, between the outer person and the inner person. We are supposed to be one person. **That's what integrity is, unity.**

Sin creates a rebellion. St. Paul mentions this, a rebellion between the flesh and the spirit rather than an integration. So the heritage of sin in our nature makes this a problem. We don't naturally move to integration. **Integration requires a certain amount of suffering and effort and struggle.** In the Greek, the word *diabolus* means the one who divides. That's the word for the devil, the one who divides. **The division is right in us between our spirit and our flesh, between the inner and the outer.** God wants to bring it together. He can't do that without our **attentiveness and attention to our desires.**

Finally, there is a little comment on vices and virtues. **Vices and virtues are habits of the soul.** All virtue comes from the Holy Spirit, although theologians argue there are

certain natural virtues. We can forget about them. If they exist, that's fine, but we don't need them. **We have virtues from the Holy Spirit.** And I wouldn't think natural virtues would be quite as rich and as powerful as the virtues from the Holy Spirit anyway.

Vices are habits resulting from resisting the Spirit. If you are baptized, the Holy Spirit has come into your life. The question is: Are you resisting or cooperating with the Spirit? The heritage of sin in our nature leads us to resist the Spirit and to develop bad habits, emotional habits, which are primarily: **pride**—me first; I am the center, a kind of atheism, at least in a small degree. **Vanity**—always thinking of the outside; how am I doing, not what is going on inside of me, but how do I look to other people? **Envy**—St. Augustine called envy “The truly diabolical vice,” but then somebody else would call another one truly diabolical, but envy has to do—it has different stages as everything else does—it begins with a sadness about oneself because one has compared oneself to somebody else, and it could become very evil when it leads to wishing that the other person did not have or was not the person that he or she is, that we find better than what we are or what we have in a way. **Avarice**, which is finding security in money or things. Greed, which is always wanting more. **Lust**, which is the desire for pleasure. And Acedia, which is often called “sloth,” but actually the word “sloth” is inappropriate. **Acedia means indifference to what is truly good.**

These are so-called “capital sins” or “deadly sins.” They are all emotional by nature. They have to do with our affective life. We have to know them. **We have to be aware of their functioning within us.** We have to be able to **pray God's protection upon us and allow him to lead us in bringing those emotions, those tendencies, passions, and drives into integrity, into union and peace.**

So that's it—the Ten Commandments.

Endnotes

¹ John Henry Cardinal Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons* V, 2 (London:Longmans, Green and Co., 1907) 21-22 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2144) p. 518.

² St. John Chrysostom, *De incomprehensibili* 3, 6: PG 48, 725. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2179) p. 526.

³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2199) p.531.

⁴ CA 36 2. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2223) p. 537.

⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2223) p. 537.

⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2278) p. 549.

⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2403) p. 577.

⁸ GS 65 2 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2424) p. 582.

⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2424) p. 582.