



Bringing Home the Word

Third Sunday of Lent | March 4, 2018

The Spirit of the Ten Commandments

By Mary Katharine Deeley

The license plate on a friend’s car reads “56789.” When someone asked him about it, he said, “Those are the commandments I’m good at.” We all had a laugh but, in truth, the commandments bear deeper reflection.

To pretend that our obedience to the Ten Commandments is limited to the literal words themselves is spiritually shallow. We may not have killed someone, but have we ever thought how much better it would be if someone weren’t in our workplace or school? Have we ever hated someone with a passion that interferes with our actions?

We may not have stolen something from a store, but have we ever taken anything that doesn’t belong to us—ideas, supplies from work? These don’t belong to us. Are there ways in which we really want what a friend has or fail to remain faithful in body, mind, and spirit? The Ten Commandments impact us far more than we realize.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus demonstrates how far the moneychangers in the temple area have strayed from the true spirit of the worship of God. They probably hadn’t given it much thought—it was the way they’d always done business. But their action made things difficult for others.

God demands a transformation that deals not only with the wrong everyone can see, but with the subtle ways we violate God’s laws and fail to love. The middle of Lent is a good time for us to make this change and, if we need to do so, repent. +

A Word From Pope Francis

Men and women are sacrificed to the idols of profit and consumption: it is the “culture of waste”....[When] someone dies, that is not news. When the stock market drops ten points, [it] is a tragedy!...People are thrown aside as if they were trash.

—General audience,
UN World Environment Day,
June 5, 2013



Sunday Readings

Exodus 20:1–17

[God said,] “You shall not steal.”

1 Corinthians 1:22–25

For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

John 2:13–25

[Jesus said,] “Take these out of here, and stop making my Father’s house a marketplace.”

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How does my faith foster humility in me?
- Are my Lenten practices helping me to be purified from sin and faithful to the gospel?



The Many Forms of Stealing

And How We Can Honor the Seventh Commandment

By Kathy Coffey

“You shall not steal” (Exodus 20:15).

We might think, “Whew! Got off easy on that one!” We law-abiding sorts don’t pilfer office supplies, skim from the collection plate, shoplift, or rob banks. At last, this is one commandment we’re handily observing, right?

Right—if we stick to the letter of the law. But the commandments are demanding, calling us beyond superficial observance. There are more forms of stealing than we might recognize. Let’s look first at homegrown forms, then at the larger picture of social justice.

For example, we rob our families of hours together when we work overtime at jobs to buy more than necessities.

The Church has long taught that people created by God are too precious to be merely a means of profit. Our birthright gifts as God’s children include dignity, security, the divine, transcendent love. So why do we hoard lesser things?

We steal a person’s enthusiasm with negative comments. We quash plans that sound naïve to us, quell a child’s creativity, stifle the initiative of a new employee. Unfounded fears can block imaginative solutions and worse—the inspiration of the Spirit.

Two forms of theft steal from the present: *anxiety* over the future or *mulling* about the past. Both rob the current moment of grace and potential.

It’s Not Just About Us

The items in closets that don’t fit or aren’t worn—these too are stolen from those who could be using them, who might actually be thrilled to have them. As St. Basil reminds us: “The coat in your closet belongs to the naked. The shoes rotting in your basement belong to the barefoot.”

Our property and talents belong to us but were given by God for the benefit of others. Here again, our model is Christ, who “became poor although he was rich, so that by his poverty you might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9).

A look through the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reveals social dimensions of this commandment, condemning: the payment of unjust wages, bribes to legislators, breaking a contract, and “work poorly done.” Furthermore, discrimination against women and immigrants, denying them job access, violates the Seventh Commandment.

How the foundations of Las Vegas must tremble to hear the words, “The passion for gambling risks becoming an enslavement” (CCC 2413). Intuitively we may cringe at the busloads of people pumping their savings into slot machines.

So, too, people who lavish more money and attention on pets than some children receive aren’t exercising proper stewardship: “One can love animals; one should not direct to them the affection due only to persons” (CCC 2418).

On a global scale, the arms race plunders the planet’s resources, substituting weapons for basic needs. President Dwight D. Eisenhower prophetically warned in his 1961 farewell address that the military-industrial complex could bleed our country’s riches.

Paying Back

To conclude on a bright note, many people are making efforts at reparation. Corporate pollution may steal clean water and air, but it’s heartening to think of the youth group at St. Edward the Confessor Parish in Richmond, VA. The kids sponsored a fast from every liquid but tap water and donated the money they would’ve spent to a project providing clean water in Nicaragua.

As Helen Keller said, “The world is full of suffering. It is full also of the overcoming of it.” Those who repay the thefts occurring in homes and society honor the Seventh Commandment brilliantly. +

PRAYER

Lord, you instill within me your power and wisdom. Help me discern clearly how to use your power and wisdom in service to my brothers and sisters.

—From *Mindful Meditations for Every Day of Lent and Easter*,
Rev. Warren J. Savage
and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

March 5–10, 2018

Mon. Lenten Weekday:
2 Kgs 5:1–15b / Lk 4:24–30


Tue. Lenten Weekday:
Dn 3:25, 34–43 / Mt 18:21–35

Wed. Lenten Weekday:
Dt 4:1, 5–9 / Mt 5:17–19

Thu. Lenten Weekday:
Jer 7:23–28 / Lk 11:14–23

Fri. Lenten Weekday:
Hos 14:2–10 / Mk 12:28–34

Sat. Lenten Weekday:
Hos 6:1–6 / Lk 18:9–14

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