

MEDITATION ON THE FIRST, SECOND, AND THIRD COMMANDMENTS

Lenten Meditation # 2, March 8th session

A short preface to the Ten Commandments

Commandments—the surest way to Eternal Life:

To the young man who asked, “Teacher, what good deed must I do, to have eternal life?” Jesus answered: “*If you would enter life, keep the Commandments*”(Mt.19: 17). To this broad statement Jesus adds: “*If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me*”(v. 21). “This requisition does not contradict the first for no one can follow without keeping the Commandments. The Law has not been abolished, or changed but only exemplified and substantiated in Jesus, the redeemer. In the three synoptic Gospels, Jesus' call to the rich young man to follow him, in the obedience of a disciple and in the observance of the Commandments, is supplemented by a forceful exhortation to practice poverty and chastity. The commandments are the beacon lights, which direct man to the Kingdom of God, and which are further brightened by evangelical counsels based on them.

Jesus acknowledged the Ten Commandments, but he also showed the power of the Spirit at work in their letter. He preached a "righteousness [which] exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees "as well as that of the Gentiles. He unfolded all the demands of the Commandments. “*You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not kill.' . . . But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment.*”(Mt. 5:21-22).

When someone asked him, "Which commandment in the Law is the greatest?" Jesus replies: “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the prophets*”(Mt. 22:37-40). The Decalogue must be interpreted in the light of this twofold yet single commandment of love, the fullness of the Law.

The Ten Commandments—the greatest gift of God

The Ten commandments are known as “Decalogue”,—meaning “ten words”. God revealed these "ten words" to his people on the holy mountain. They were written "with the finger of God," unlike the other commandments written down by Moses. So they are pre-eminently the words of God. They are handed on to us in the books of *Exodus* and *Deuteronomy*. In the Old Testament, the sacred books refer to the "ten words," but it is in the New Covenant in Jesus Christ that their full meaning is revealed.

The Exodus—the context of the Ten Commandments

The Decalogue must be understood in the context of the Exodus, God's merciful liberation in the Old Covenant a befitting prelude to the total human Emancipation in the New Testament won at the highest cost. These commandments whether positive or negative in context lay down the conditions for a life, freed from the slavery of sin. The Decalogue is a ten-fold path of life: “*If you love the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping*

his commandments and his statutes and his ordinances, then you shall live and multiply” (Deut. 30:16).

Ten Commandments sum up and codify God’s law

The "ten words" embody God’s will for man: *"These words the Lord spoke to all your assembly at the mountain out of the midst of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, with a loud voice; and he added no more. And he wrote them upon two tables of stone, and gave them to me"* (Deut. 5:2). For this reason these two tables are called "the Testimony." In fact, they contain the terms of the covenant concluded between God and his people. That "tables of the Testimony" were to be deposited in "the ark." Speak eloquently of their sanctity.

The "ten words" are pronounced by God in the midst of a theophany (*"The LORD spoke with you face to face at the mountain, out of the midst of the fire."*-Deut. 5:4). They belong to God's revelation of Himself and His glory. The gift of the Commandments is the gift of God himself and His holy will. In making His will known, God reveals himself to His people.

Ten Commandments—a vital part of the Covenant

The gift of the commandments and of the Law is part of the covenant God sealed with His own people. In *Exodus*, the revelation of the "ten words" is granted between the proposal of the covenant and its conclusion - after the people had committed themselves to "do" all that the Lord had said, and to "obey" it. The Decalogue is never handed on only after getting confirmation of the acceptance of the covenant (*"The LORD our God made a covenant with us in Horeb."*- Deut. 5:2)

The Commandments take on their full meaning within the covenant. According to the Scripture, man's moral life receives all its meaning in and through the covenant. The first of the "ten words" was an assertion that God loved his people: “Since there was a passing from the paradise of freedom to the slavery of this world, in punishment for sin, the first phrase of the Decalogue, the first word of God's commandments, bears on freedom "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."

The Commandments properly so-called come in only after the initial reminder of God’s, justice and mercy: they express the implications of belonging to God through the establishment of the covenant. Moral existence is a *response* to the Lord's loving initiative. It is the acknowledgement and homage given to God and a worship of thanksgiving. It is cooperation with the plan God pursues through the ages.

The Ten Commandments—obligatory for Christians

“The Council of Trent teaches that the Ten Commandments are obligatory for Christians and that the justified man is still bound to keep them; the Second Vatican Council confirms: "The bishops, successors of the apostles, receive from the Lord . . . the mission of teaching all peoples, and of preaching the Gospel to every creature, so that all men may attain salvation through faith, Baptism and the observance of the Commandments."(ccc2068).

Since they express man's fundamental duties towards God and towards his neighbor, the Ten Commandments reveal, in their primordial content, *grave* obligations. They are fundamentally immutable, and they oblige always and everywhere. No one can dispense from them. The Ten Commandments are engraved by God in the human heart.

The Ten Commandments—natural law for whole humanity

The Ten Commandments belong to God's revelation. At the same time they teach us the true humanity of man. They bring to light the essential duties, and therefore, indirectly, the fundamental rights inherent in the nature of the human person. The Decalogue contains a privileged expression of the natural law: "From the beginning, God had implanted in the heart of man the precepts of the natural law. Then he was content to remind him of them. This was the Decalogue" (St. Irenaus).

The Ten Commandments—the expression of God's love

I have already mentioned that the Decalogue must be understood in the context of the Exodus, because it was given exactly at the culmination point of the Exodus. And, since the Exodus was undoubtedly the greatest expression of God's love that He expressed in the entire gamut of the Old Testament, giving the Commandments was also an expression of God's love. Because it was a mass liberation project of God for which God Himself took all the initiative and He himself took care of each and every single step in it until its fulfillment. And from the infants to the old, every single person was and is a recipient of the fruit of this total redemption work.

God's incredible compassion—the starting point of the Exodus that led to the giving of the Commandments:

It is very much evident that the sole motivation behind the Exodus event was God's sheer love for His people. It was God's compassion for the oppressed Israelites in Egypt that induced Him to send Moses to the Pharaoh. At that time Moses was in exile and tending the flock of his father-in-law. The account of the event runs thus: "*God called out to him from the bush, "Moses! Moses... I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob. I have witnessed the affliction of my people in Egypt and have heard their cry of complaint against their slave drivers, so I know well what they are suffering. Therefore, I have come down to rescue them from the hands of the Egyptians and lead them out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey...So indeed the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have truly noted that the Egyptians are oppressing them. Come, now! I will send you to Pharaoh to lead my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt"* (Ex. 3:5-10).

God's tremendous love moved people's hearts to welcome the Commandments

The ten miracles God worked to punish the Pharaoh, to soften his mind to let people go, the terrifying things He has done in Egypt, the disasters with which he struck Egypt including the killing of all the first born sons of Egypt—all these measures were taken because of God's longing to save His people from their misery. Since they left Egypt God Himself went with them in their forty years of journey through the desert. He gave them daily bread, Manna and locusts to eat. He made water sprout from the rock in Horeb by a miracle when they were on the point of death from thirst. Besides all these, He split the sea in two, so that the Israelites might pass through the parted space. How incredible was that episode!

“Pharaoh made his chariots ready and mustered his soldiers--six hundred first-class chariots and all the other chariots of Egypt, with warriors on them all. So obstinate had the LORD made Pharaoh that he pursued the Israelites even while they were marching away in triumph. The Egyptians, then, pursued them; Pharaoh's whole army, his horses, chariots and charioteers, caught up with them as they lay encamped by the sea, at Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon. Pharaoh was already near when the Israelites looked up and saw that the Egyptians were on the march in pursuit of them. In great fright they cried out to the LORD... The angel of God, who had been leading Israel's camp, now moved and went around behind them. The column of cloud also, leaving the front, took up its place behind them, so that it came between the camp of the Egyptians and that of Israel. But the cloud now became dark, and thus the night passed without the rival camps coming any closer together all night long. Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the LORD swept the sea with a strong east wind throughout the night and so turned it into dry land. When the water was thus divided, the Israelites marched into the midst of the sea on dry land, with the water like a wall to their right and to their left. The Egyptians followed in pursuit; all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and charioteers went after them right into the midst of the sea. In the night watch just before dawn the LORD cast through the column of the fiery cloud upon the Egyptian force a glance that threw it into a panic; and he so clogged their chariot wheels that they could hardly drive. With that the Egyptians sounded the retreat before Israel, because the LORD was fighting for them against the Egyptians. Then the LORD told Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the water may flow back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots and their charioteers." So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at dawn the sea flowed back to its normal depth. The Egyptians were fleeing head on toward the sea, when the LORD hurled them into its midst. As the water flowed back, it covered the chariots and the charioteers of Pharaoh's whole army which had followed the Israelites into the sea. Not a single one of them escaped. But the Israelites had marched on dry land through the midst of the sea, with the water like a wall to their right and to their left” (Ex.14:6-10, 19-29).

As the Israelites arrived mount Sinai, in order to make them understand the meaning of the Ten commandments which he was about to give, God reminded them all that he had done for them for the past 40 years out of His deep love them: “You have seen for yourselves how I treated the Egyptians and how I bore you up on eagle wings and brought you here to myself. Therefore, if you hearken to my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my special possession, dearer to me than all other people, though all the earth is mine. You shall be to me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation”(Ex. 19:4-6).. This shows that God was very particular that humanity should know that the obeying of Commandments is their response to Gods’ infinite love and it is not at all putting up with certain hard rules, but expression of every hearts desire to respond to this much incredible love.

God’s love impressed upon the people so much as to accept the Commandments as the law of their new life

And the way people responded shows that they were deeply touched by God’s love for them. They unanimously waved they would do everything the Lord asked of them: *“When he set before them all that the LORD had ordered him to tell them, **the people all answered together, "Everything the LORD has said, we will do."** Then Moses brought back to the LORD the response of the people”* (Ex. 19:4-8). It was only then that God summoned Moses

to the top of the mountain with Aaron in order to entrust them with the Ten Commandments, which God Himself wrote with His own finger. [Moses testifies it like this: *“When I had gone up the mountain to receive the stone tablets of the covenant which the LORD made with you. Meanwhile I stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights without eating or drinking, till the LORD gave me the two tablets of stone inscribed, by God's own finger, with a copy of all the words that the LORD spoke to you on the mountain from the midst of the fire on the day of the assembly”* (Deut. 9: 9-10)].

Here, we need to note very clearly that it was only after the people had offered had their willing, enthusiastic and loving desire to obey the Commandments that God gave them the Ten Commandments. From this it is very clear that the Commandments were not imposed upon them but they voluntarily welcomed them as well-meant regulations loving rules for their own benefit. In fact they looked upon them as Fatherly directions and to help them satisfy their yearning to maintain the new relationship with God which they had most willingly agreed up on. For them that new life was indeed an adequate thanksgiving to God for His mighty deed! Yes, in a sense, the giving of the Commandments was not much of God's initiative as of the people.

Consequently, the Commandments were to be adhered to both in their letter and spirit.

Since the Commandments were seen as a lamp for their feet to light up their path, (and truly they were so) God insisted that they should observe it in toto. *“Above all, be firm and steadfast, taking care to observe the entire law which my servant Moses enjoined on you. Do not swerve from it either to the right or to the left, that you may succeed wherever you go. Keep this book of the law on your lips. Recite it by day and by night, that you may observe carefully all that is written in it; then you will successfully attain your goal. I command you: be firm and steadfast! Do not fear nor be dismayed, for the LORD, your God, is with you wherever you go”* (Joshua. 1:7-9). And God promised great victory to those who were faithful in its strict observance.

Unfaithfulness to the Commandments-a heavy loss.

For the very reason mentioned above, that it is the lamp for the feet, and light for the path, unfaithfulness to it necessarily results in great loss and even disaster: *“But if you do not hearken to the voice of the LORD, your God, and are not careful to observe all his commandments which I enjoin on you today, all these curses shall come upon you and overwhelm you: "May you be cursed in the city, and cursed in the country! "Cursed be your grain bin and your kneading bowl! "Cursed be the fruit of your womb, the produce of your soil and the offspring of your livestock, the issue of your herds and the young of your flocks! "May you be cursed in your coming in, and cursed in your going out! "The LORD will put a curse on you, defeat and frustration in every enterprise you undertake, until you are speedily destroyed and perish for the evil you have done in forsaking me... If you are not careful to observe every word of the law which is written in this book, and to revere the glorious and awesome name of the LORD, your God, he will smite you and your descendants with severe and constant blows, malignant and lasting maladies. He will again afflict you with all the diseases of Egypt which you dread, and they will persist among you. Should there be any kind of sickness or calamity not mentioned in this book of the law, that too the LORD will bring upon you until you are destroyed”* (Deut. 28:15-20, 58-61).

Do not be misled into the feeling that it is God's terrible wrath that is highlighted in the above words. Really, it is baseless to take such an attitude. Obedience to the Commandments is indispensable to reap the bountiful blessings that lie in store for us. In fact mild threat of punishment held out by God speaks more of God's infinite love than His severity. We know that parents sometimes threaten their children with terrible punishments. That only reflects their tremendous concern for their children. They are very particular to see that their children will have an orderly prosperous life ahead.

All these strict and compelling words make sense when we consider that the Commandments were given in great love. That is why, disobedience to them becomes a serious and it brings in great punishments.

Jesus perfected the Commandments.

Though the Law was given through Moses, it was fully unfolded only by Jesus. Firstly, since Jesus is the Word of the Father and the fulfillment of all that was revealed in the Old testament, only Jesus can reveal the whole meaning and true implications of the Law. *"I have much to say about you in condemnation. But the one who sent me is true, and what I heard from him I tell the world"* (Jn. 8:26); *"Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill"* (Mt. 5:17). *"You have heard that it was said to your ancestors, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you, whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment, and whoever says to his brother, 'Raga,' will be answerable to the Sanhedrin, and whoever says, 'You fool,' will be liable to fiery Gehenna."* (Mt. 5:21-23); *You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you, everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one of your members than to have your whole body thrown into Gehenna. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one of your members than to have your whole body go into Gehenna. "It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife must give her a bill of divorce.' But I say to you, whoever divorces his wife (unless the marriage is unlawful) causes her to commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. Again you have heard that it was said to your ancestors, 'Do not take a false oath, but make good to the Lord all that you vow.' But I say to you, do not swear at all"* (Mt. 5:27-34)

Secondly, in sending Jesus to die for us, God expressed His Love for us in its fullness. So our obligation to obey His commandments increased all the more. If unfaithfulness to the Old testament Law to its very letter was very serious and severely punishable as it was against the great love God expressed in the Exodus, how much more serious would it be to be unfaithful to the Law Christ perfected in the gospels in the New Testament. This is very clear from Jesus' warning to the Pharisees who were very strict in the observance of the Law in obeying it outwardly but not in its true spirit.

Commandments deserve to be observed in a spirit of love and gratitude because Christ has sealed the new covenant with his life-blood.

The Commandments have received a new color and perspective through Jesus' death. It is only in the light of the Passion and death of Christ that one can understand fully the damage that is caused by any act of disobedience to the Commandments, which turns into sin. That

was why the saints chose to die rather than disobey even the smallest of the Lord's teachings. Hence, let us ask the Holy Spirit to open our minds to understand the implications of each commandment in the background of his love for us, which he expressed in his dolorous Passion and Death. Fervent prayer in an attitude of gratitude will surely help us to overcome the temptations unleashed by Satan and his gang. God's abiding love will strengthen us, weak though we are by nature. Rest, assured Christ's supreme sacrifice on the Calvary will never go wasted in You and me, for love is invincible and indomitable!

The unity of the Ten Commandments

The Ten commandments constitute one law. They are not ten separate laws. They express one thing, the will of God. "Whoever keeps the whole law, but falls short in one particular, has become guilty in respect to all of it. For he who said, "You shall not commit adultery," also said, "You shall not kill." Even if you do not commit adultery but kill, you have become a transgressor of the law" (Jam. 2:10-11). To transgress one commandment amounts to infringing all the others too. "The Decalogue forms a coherent whole. Each "word" intertwined each of the others and with all of them; they reciprocally condition one another. The two tables shed light on each other; they form an organic unity. One cannot honor another without showing due reverence to God, his Creator. One cannot adore God without loving all his fellowmen, created by the same hand. The Decalogue brings man's religious and social life into a homogeneous whole.

Negative and positive sides of the Commandments

There is a negative and a positive side to all the commandments. The fact that they have a general negative tone ("You shall not..") does not mean that they have a negative content. Each negation is "the other side of the coin" of a positive command. For example, "no idolatry" means " worship God"; "do not kill" means to love ; " no adultery" means grow in purity by using all the emotional and physical powers to love and serve others unselfishly.

Reward attending on the compliance of the commandments

Its reward is enormous, to name a few:

- Mercy will be shown to thousand generations: Deut. 5:10,
- Eternal life will be granted: Mt. 19: 16-17,
- Jesus will ask and obtain the Holy Sprit for those who keep the Commandments: Jn. 14: 15-16,
- Success in everything: (Joshua. 1: 6-8),
- Enormous blessings in the form of material prosperity: Deut. 28:1-14,
- Possession of God and the establishment of a profound and intimate relation with God: Exod. 19:5

THE FIRST THREE COMMANDMENTS

Introduction to the first three commandments

The first three commandments relate to our duty to love God. They tell us that the sole purpose of our life here on earth is to love God. They require that our life should be totally God-centered, as against our natural to be self-centered. They want us that everything we do should be in furtherance of our love of God. They demand that the sole motivation behind all our activities should be aimed at glorifying God. They tell us that our love for our beloved ones should be subordinated to and promotive of our love of God. They tell us that the use of the wealth and all other good things of this world should be made in such a way that it will take us nearer to God.

Loving God—Mans first and fore most duty

Jesus summed up man's duties toward God thus: "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind*"(Deut. 6:4).

We all are very much conscious of our duties and responsibilities, and to a great extent we do our best to be faithful to them. And we are very eager to do our responsibilities in perfection. That is well and good. But do we have a right perspective regarding priorities? To whom do we owe most? Certainly to God! Then the primary duty of every human being is to love God. It is in order to love God that we have been bestowed upon with life on this earth.

The misfortune is that even though we quickly feel bad about our failures in loving others and do all that we can to correct the mistakes, our attitude lacks sincerity and earnestness our love towards God is lukewarm. St John Vianny says: "The paradox is that we lavish our love upon objects unworthy of it, and refuse it to Him alone who deserves to be infinitely loved. Thus, a person will love riches, another will love pleasures; and both will offer to the good God nothing but the languishing remains of a heart worn out in the service of the world. From thence comes insufficient love, divided love, which is for the very reason unworthy of the good Lord".

Loving God above all else is necessary

It is not enough that we love God, we need to love God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind. This phrase gives us an idea of the highest expects of us.

To Love God with whole heart

It means to prefer God to everything else, so as to be ready to lose all our possessions, our honor, our life for His sake in His love. To love God with our whole heart is to love nothing incompatible with the love of God. It is to love nothing that can share even a bit, our love for the good God. It requires of us to renounce all our passions, all our ill-regulated desires.

To love God with whole mind

This condition demands that we should subordinate our knowledge and reason, to all that He has taught us. To love God with our whole mind is to think of Him often, and to make it our principal study to know Him ever more.

To love God with all our strength

This enjoys us that we should employ all our possessions, our health, and our talents in the service of God and in glorifying Him. It is to attune all our actions to his will as our ultimate end in life

Do we really love God as we should? Let us reflect on it for a moment!

In loving God we prove ourselves responsive to God's love for us

CCC says: "God has loved us first. The love of the One God is recalled in the first of the "ten words." The commandments then make explicit the response of love that man is called to give to his God" (ccc 2083).

"Then God delivered all these commandments: "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" (Ex. 20: 1-5).

This revelation is meant to let us know that God started loving his people before He required of them to love Him through the commandments. This fact should be well understood when we think of our obligation to love God. The fact that before asking us to love Him God told us how much he loved us puts a grave responsibility on us with regard to both our obligation to love Him and the quality of our love towards Him. First of all, since God has loved us first, it is but natural that we respond by returning it in like measure. In other words we should not only love God but also love Him with the same love with which he loves us!

God reminded the Israelites how He took care of them in the past with a view to inspiring them to love him. The reminder of their liberation from Egypt was quite enough for the Israelites to become conscious of their great obligation to love God with their whole heart. If so, we too need to remember how God loved us in the past. It is very helpful to remember all our experiences—from childhood to this very moment—, which convince us how much God, loved us personally. We need to spend sometime regularly to dwell on them. We were nothing, but God made us great! We had nothing, but God gave us everything. We were great sinners, but God forgave us and gave us all the spiritual blessings.

Christ's death should inspire us all the more to love God

But the greatest thing we need to remember is the love God has expressed by immolating His only Son for the expiation of our sins. If God reminded Israelites of their liberation from Pharaoh's bondage to make them feel obliged, how much more eloquent will He be in expatiating on the supreme sacrifice he has made in immolating His only Son for our eternal liberation! This incomparable love has to catch our hearts' entire attention. In fact this great Event is the only subject matter that deserves our permanent attention. Hence in the Preface of Eucharistic Liturgy we admit everyday: "It is our duty and our salvation always and every where to give you thanks through your beloved Son Jesus Christ....."

In fact, the reason why the Catholic Church celebrates Mass everyday is to give us ample opportunities to experience this abundance of love on the cross daily and get intoxicated with this love. Then we are strengthened to love God in return with the same

intensity. For, St. Paul says that Mass is exactly the death of Christ: *As often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes*” (I Cor. 11:26). We know that a person’s death is announced at that exact time when that person actually dies, and not before or later. It is totally absurd to notify one’s death before one dies; and there is no meaning either in proclaiming a person’s death except at the time of death, because it is already known. St. Paul’s words *“As often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes”* gives us guarantee that we are privileged to experience the most tremendous love God ever expressed on the Eucharistic Table. Jesus commanded thus: “Do this in memory of Me”. The purpose was, obviously, to give us the experience of His infinite love quite often, even daily—if we have the good will. The ultimate purpose, again, was to help us to love God in return for love started from God and God alone.

Besides, the celebration of the Eucharist, ongoing meditation on the Passion and related Scripture are also very helpful.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him”(Jn. 3:16-17).

“In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins” (I Jn. 4:10).

“You were ransomed from your futile conduct, handed on by your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold but with the precious blood of Christ as of a spotless unblemished lamb”

(I Pet. 1:18-19).

“He himself bore our sins in his body upon the cross, so that, free from sin, we might live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed” (I Pet. 2:24-25).

“He was pierced for our offenses, crushed for our sins, Upon him was the chastisement that makes us whole, by his stripes we were healed. We had all gone astray like sheep, each following his own way; But the LORD laid upon him the guilt of us all” (Is. 53:5-6).

Certain other ways to experience God’s love

Yes, if we meditate on the Passion and death of Christ sincerely and regularly we will certainly feel very much inclined to love Him. If we find time to sit under the foot of the cross to reflect on each of the torments in Jesus’ suffering our whole perspective will change. We will become convinced of the inadequacy of our love for Him and begin to love God far better than we have been doing. Lent is particularly meant for this meditation.

Meditation on the Stations of the Cross, spending enough time to reflect and pray, will also be of great help in this regard. That is why the Church promotes the devotion of the Stations of the Cross during lent so zealously.

Meditation of the Most Holy Rosary is very powerful to generate love for God. Because, first of all Rosary, though looks as a Marian prayer is Christo-centric. It is centered on the greatest act of God’s love—the Incarnation, the life and the death of Christ. Secondly, this meditation is conducted not by ourselves in isolation, but with Blessed Virgin Mary who

pondered over this Event with such a deep love that it pierced her heart as if with a sword long before she became an eye witness to the supreme sacrifice on the cross! Hence Pope John Paul in his Apostolic Letter on Rosary (Rosarium Virgins Mariae) says: "In the spiritual journey of the Rosary, based on the constant contemplation – in Mary's company – of the face of Christ, this demanding ideal of being conformed to him is pursued through an association which could be described in terms of friendship. We are thereby enabled to enter naturally into Christ's life and as it were to share his deepest feelings. In this regard Blessed Bartolo Longo has written: "Just as two friends, frequently in each other's company, tend to develop similar habits, so too, by holding familiar converse with Jesus and the Blessed Virgin, by meditating on the mysteries of the Rosary and by living the same life in Holy Communion, we can become, to the extent of our lowliness, similar to them and can learn from these supreme models a life of humility, poverty, hiddenness, patience and perfection"(RVM #15)

First Commandment--explanation

The first commandment is all about loving God with all our heart. Thus God says: "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your strength*" (Deut. 6:5). It asks us to give the first place to God in our life. It is an invitation to lead a God-centered life instead of a self-centered one.

The priority of the First Commandment

All sins are sins against the first commandment; the first commandment contains the whole of the Decalogue. For all sins serve some other god, obey another commander: the world or the flesh or the devil. So if we obeyed only this one commandment perfectly, we would need nothing more. St. Augustine says, "Love God and then do what you will". For if you give your whole heart and will and love to God, then what you will be all that God wills.

Adoration of God-Positive side of the first commandment

The negative side of the first commandment is: "*you shall have no other gods before me*" (Ex. 20:3). But it has a positive side and it is revealed through Jesus' teaching: "*You shall worship the Lord your God*" (Mt. 4:10).

"... To adore God is to acknowledge him as God, as the Creator and Savior, the Lord and Master of everything that exists, as infinite and merciful Love. "You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve," says Jesus, citing Deuteronomy" (ccc 2096).

"To adore God is to acknowledge, in respect and absolute submission, the "nothingness of the creature" who would not exist but for God. To adore God is to praise and exalt Him and to humble oneself, as Mary did in the Magnificat, confessing with gratitude that He has done great things and holy is His name. The worship of the one God sets man free from turning in on himself, from the slavery of sin and the idolatry of the world" (2097).

Adoration or Worship includes faith, hope, and charity

Catechism of the Catholic Church says: "*the first commandment summons man to believe in God, to hope in him, and to love him above all else*" (2134). The reasons for these three demands are in the character of God himself

a) Faith:

“When we say 'God' we confess a constant, unchangeable being, always the same, faithful and just, without any evil. It follows that we must necessarily accept his words and have complete faith in him and acknowledge his authority” (ccc 2086)

Having faith in God and putting our whole trust in him are the expression of our love for God. It pleases God most. Abraham pleased God by his blind faith in God. Holy Mary became blessed among all women by her faith in God. Chapter 11 of the Book of Hebrews gives a beautiful and inspiring description of how our forefathers did great things by their faith in God. On the contrary, lack of faith and trust in God offends him greatly. The tragedy of Adam and Eve is the example. Zachariah, the husband of Elizabeth, was made mute because of his lack of faith in the “unreasonable thing” God told him through the angel Gabriel. Ananias did not find favor with God, due to his lack of full trust in God, even though he sold all his property and put the money at the feet of the Apostles.

The essence of faith is this: “Faith in God leads us to turn to him alone as our goal, and neither prefer anything to him nor to substitute anything for him”(ccc 229)

b) Hope:

“He is almighty, merciful, and infinitely beneficent. Who could not place all hope in him?” (ccc 2086)

“When God reveals Himself and calls him, man cannot fully respond to the divine love by his own powers. He must hope that God will give him the capacity to love Him in return and to act in conformity with the commandments of charity. Hope is the confident expectation of divine blessing and the beatific vision of God; it is also the fear of offending God's love and of incurring punishment” (ccc 2096).

c) Charity:

“Who could not love him when contemplating the treasures of goodness and love he has poured out on us? Hence the formula God employs in the Scripture at the beginning and end of his commandments: 'I am the LORD” (ccc 2086)

“Faith in God's love encompasses the call and the obligation to respond with sincere love to divine charity. The first commandment enjoins us to love God above everything and all creatures for him and because of him” (ccc 2093).

We adore God in Prayer

“The acts of faith, hope, and charity enjoined by the first commandment are accomplished in prayer. Lifting up the mind toward God is an expression of our adoration of God: prayer of praise and thanksgiving, intercession and petition. Prayer is an indispensable condition for being able to obey God's commandments. “[We] ought always to pray and not lose heart” (ccc2098).

Through his example Jesus taught us that prayer is the most basic and most important expression of our love for God, our dependency on Him, and our nothingness. He even taught us that lack of prayer will make us prone to sin. It is not just an objectionable act

but constitutes the principal sin because in the absence of prayer one becomes vulnerable to every temptation. This is clear in the words: “*Watch and pray that you may not undergo the test. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak*” (Mt. 26:41).

This means, one who is not committed to faithfulness in prayer is wide open to the power of the Enemy; at an opportune time the enemy will overpower him. That is why St. Paul says: “*Pray without ceasing*” (I Thess. 5:17). Hence, mere mechanical or peripheral prayer, short term prayer, neglecting up prayer in inconvenient situations, etc, are grave failures with regard to love of God. The ideology of “*work is worship*” is a practical atheistic philosophy! Jesus, by his own strict practice of daily intense, lengthy prayer stressed the need of an enduring prayer life.

Prayer of praise is the supreme form of prayer because its whole focus is God. There we acknowledge His majesty, greatness, power, and all His other qualities and glorify Him for what He is. Thanksgiving comes next in importance. Since we express our gratitude to God for what he has done for us, it is bound to be quite pleasing to God and so, very efficacious. In intercession and petition we lift up our hearts to God put our trust in Him in solving all our problems in life; hence that also is an expression of our love for Him as well as our faith and hope in Him.

Besides prayer, offering sacrifices to God, and making and keeping promises or vows are effective means of adoring God. “In many circumstances, the Christian is called upon to make *promises* to God. Baptism and Confirmation, Matrimony and Holy Orders always entail promises. Out of personal devotion, the Christian may also promise to God some special acts of piety such as alms-giving abstinence and penance. “ Fidelity to promises made to God is a sign of the respect owed to the divine majesty and of love for a faithful God” (ccc 2101).

A. Sins against faith

“Disregarding or refusing to hold as true what God has revealed and the Church has proposed to believe is sin against faith”. (cf. ccc 2088).

(1) Lack of faith in God

Deliberate doubt in the existence of God, unbelief in the forgiving love of God, attributing to God every evil in the world, questioning God’s loving providence and all-mighty power at the face of natural catastrophe , lack of fear of God that leads to persistence in sin etc are signs of lack of faith in God.

(2) Lack of faith in the Teachings of the Church

It is not enough to have faith in God; we should have faith in the Holy Catholic Church too. We profess that in the Creed, by saying: ‘ I believe in the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church’. The reason is obvious: the Church is his own body of which he is the head. The Church is the continuation of Christ himself, as the II Vatican documents avow. Moreover, Jesus has entrusted his authority to the Apostolic Church, of which the Apostles are the pillars. Jesus said to them: “ *All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me, Go, therefore and make disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe all that I have*

commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of age” (Mt.28:18-20). And, as everyone knows, only the Catholic Church has the unbreakable apostolic succession(some Orthodox Churches also have). Therefore faith in God urges us to believe in the teaching authority of the Church and to accept all the official teachings of the Church such as:

- It is God who created the Heavens and the earth,
- Jesus is the Son of God and the Savior of the world,
- He was born from the Virgin Mary; suffered, died, buried, and risen on the third day
- The Holy Spirit is the Lord and giver of life(the Holy Spirit is a separate Person from the Father and the Son
- Faith in the Holy , Catholic and Apostolic Church,
- Faith in the forgiveness of sins,
- Faith in the communion of saints,
- Faith in the resurrection of the body,
- Faith in the everlasting life.

(3) Superstitious Beliefs

Catechism of the Catholic Church says: “ Superstition is a departure from the worship we give to true God. It is manifested in idolatry, as well as in various forms of divination and magic” (ccc 2138). Read also Romans 1: 21-23; Deut. 18: 9-12; ccc 2117).

“Superstition is the deviation of religious feeling and of the practices this feeling imposes. It can even affect the worship we offer the true God, e.g., when one attributes an importance in some way magical to certain practices otherwise lawful or necessary . To attribute the efficacy of prayers or of sacramental signs to their mere external performance , apart from the interior dispositions that they demand, is to fall into superstition” (ccc. 2111. cf. Mt 23: 16—22).

(4) Idolatry

“ The 1st Commandment condemns polytheism. It requires man neither to believe in nor to venerate, other divinities than the one true God... “ (ccc. 2112).

“ Idolatry not only refers to false pagan worship. It remains a constant temptation to faith. Idolatry consists in divinizing what is not God. Man commits idolatry whenever he honors and reveres a creature in place of God, whether this be god’s or demons (for example, Satanism), power, pleasure, race, ancestors, the state, money, etc. Jesus says, “ you can not serve God and mammon”—Mt. 6:24. Many martyrs died for refusing to adore “the Beast”—Revv13-14 , refusing even to simulate such worship. Idolatry rejects the unique Lordship of God” (ccc. 2113)

(5) Divination

“A sound Christian attitude consists in putting oneself confidently into the hands of Providence for whatever concerns the future, and giving up all unhealthy curiosity about it...” (ccc 2115).

Therefore, “ all forms of divination are to be rejected:

- recourse to Satan or demons,
- conjuring up the dead or other practices falsely supposed to “unveil” the future,
- consulting horoscopes,
- astrology,
- palm reading,
- interpretation of omens and lots,
- the phenomena of clairvoyance,
- recourse to mediums.

Because all these conceal a desire for power over time, history, and , in the last analysis, other human beings, as well as a wish to conciliate hidden powers. They contradict the honor, respect, and loving fear that we owe to God alone” (ccc.2116)

(6) Magic or sorcery

“ All practice of *magic* or *sorcery*, by which one attempts to tame occult powers, so as to place them at one’s service and have a supernatural power over others – even if this were for the sake of restoring their health – are gravely contrary to the virtue of religion. These practices are even more to be condemned when accompanied by the intention of harming someone, or when they have recourse to the intervention of demons. Wearing charms is also reprehensible. *Spiritism* often implies divination or magical practices; the Church for her part warns the faithful against it. Recourse to so-called traditional cures does not justify either the invocation of evil powers or the exploitation of another’s credulity” (ccc. 2117).

(7) Irreligion

“ The first commandment condemns the main sins of irreligion: tempting God, in word or deeds, sacrilege, and simony” (ccc2118).

“*Tempting God* consists in putting his goodness and almighty power to the test by word or deed. Thus Satan tried to induce Jesus to throw himself down from the Temple and, by this gesture, force God to act.... The challenge contained in such tempting of God wounds the respect and trust we owe our Creator and Lord. It always harbors doubt about his love, his providence, and his power” (ccc.2119).

“*Sacrilege* consists in profaning or treating unworthily the sacraments and other liturgical actions, as well as persons, things, or places consecrated to God. Sacrilege is a grave sin especially when committed against the Eucharist, for in this sacrament the true Body of Christ is made substantially present for us (ccc. 2120).

(8) Atheism

“Atheism is often based on a false conception of human autonomy, exaggerated to the point of refusing any dependence on God”. (ccc 2126)

“Since it rejects or denies the existence of God, atheism is a sin against the virtue of religion”(ccc2125)

The name “atheism” covers various other phenomena:

- *Practical materialism* which restricts its needs and aspirations to space and time.
- *Atheistic humanism* falsely considers man to “an end to himself, and the sole maker, with supreme control, of his own history”.
- *Another form of contemporary atheism* looks for the liberation of man through economic and social liberation. (ccc. 2164)

B Sins against hope

(1) Despair

“By despair man ceases to hope for his personal salvation from God, for help in attaining it or for the forgiveness of his sins. Despair is contrary to God’s goodness, to his justice- for the lord is faithful to his promises- and to his mercy” (ccc.2091).

(2) Presumption

“There are two kinds of *presumption*. Either man presumes upon his own capacities,(hoping to be able to save himself without help from high), or he presumes upon God’s almighty power or his mercy(hoping to obtain his forgiveness without conversion and glory without merit)”. Ccc. 2091.

C Sins against Charity

“Faith in God’s love encompasses the call and the obligation to respond with sincere love to divine charity. The first commandment enjoins us to love God above everything and all creatures for him and because of him”(2093)

2094 One can sin against God’s love in various ways:

- *indifference* neglects or refuses to reflect on divine charity; it fails to consider its pre-eminent goodness and denies its power.
- *Ingratitude* fails or refuses to acknowledge divine charity and to return him love for love.
- *Luke-warmness*; It is hesitation or negligence in responding to divine love.
- *Acedia or spiritual sloth*; goes so far as to refuse the joy that comes from God and to be repelled by divine goodness

The Second Commandment

'You shall not take the name of the LORD, your God, in vain. For the LORD will not leave unpunished him who takes his name in vain" (Det. 5:11)

God has done amazing things in revealing his name and his identity to us. Since the Lord's name is holy, no one should use the name of God except to bless, praise, and glorify it. "Among all the words of Revelation, there is one which is unique: the revealed name of God. God confides his name to those who believe in him; he reveals himself to them in his personal mystery. The gift of a name belongs to the order of trust and intimacy. "The Lord's name is holy." For this reason man must not abuse it. He must keep it in mind in silent, loving adoration. He will not introduce it into his own speech except to bless, praise, and glorify it" (ccc 2143).

Likewise, the names of Mary and the saints are to be honored and not abused: "The second commandment *forbids the abuse of God's name*, i.e., every improper use of the names of God, Jesus Christ, and of the Virgin Mary and all the saints" (21:46). Some Catholics, and many of the non-catholic Christians think that it is not necessary to honor Mary. But the Scripture never approves such a misunderstanding. On the contrary, it specifies that Mary is to be honored by all generations: "And Mary said: ¹⁶ "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord;

my spirit rejoices in God my savior. For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness; behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed" (Lk. 1:46-48). And Jesus officially approved it and proclaimed it just before his death since it was one of the most important things he had to accomplish in the work of salvation he perfected by his death on the cross.

It is acceptable to make solemn promises or take oaths (administered by legitimate authority) in God's name (see ccc2147, 2154-55). However, false oaths, oaths that misuse God's name, and magical use of the divine name are to be rejected; So is speaking words of hatred or defiance against God, speaking ill of God, failing to respect God's name, or misusing it in the sin of blasphemy, which the Scripture condemns (see Jas. 2:7; ccc 2148). Perjury, which is lying under oath or taking an oath with no intention of keeping it , is also contrary to the second commandment.

The Third Commandment

'Take care to keep holy the Sabbath day as the LORD, your God, commanded you" (Det. 5: 12).

"the seventh day is the Sabbath of complete rest, sacred to the LORD" (Ex 31:15)

The Sabbath which Israel observed in commemoration of God's rest on the seventh day of creation (Ex20:11) and of his covenant and saving actions on behalf of Israel, has been continued and fulfilled by observance of "the Lord's Day", Sunday—the day of Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead.

St. Justin alludes to the fact that from the beginning of the Church , Christians gathered to worship God and celebrate the Eucharist on Sunday, the Lord's Day. "The Sunday celebration of the Lord's Day and the Eucharist is at the heart of the Church's life. "Sunday is

the day on which the paschal mystery is celebrated in the light of the apostolic tradition and is to be observed as the foremost holy day of obligation in the universal Church."¹¹⁰

"Also to be observed are the day of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Epiphany, the Ascension of Christ, the feast of the Body and Blood of Christi, the feast of Mary the Mother of God, her Immaculate Conception, her Assumption, the feast of Saint Joseph, the feast of the Apostle Saints Peter and Paul, and the feast of All Saints. (2177) "This practice of the Christian assembly dates from the beginnings of the apostolic age."¹¹² The *Letter to the Hebrews* reminds the faithful "not to neglect to meet together, as is the habit of some, but to encourage one another."(2178)

Man needs a day each week set apart to worship God, for relaxation, and for the leisure to perform works of mercy that can not easily be done on other days. The Catechism gives some guidelines and practical directives with regard to the observance of the Lords Day (in addition to the obligation to attend Mass on Sunday and all holidays of obligation. "On Sundays and other holy days of obligation, the faithful are to refrain from engaging in work or activities that hinder the worship owed to God, the joy proper to the Lord's Day, the performance of the works of mercy, and the appropriate relaxation of mind and body."¹²³ Family needs or important social service can legitimately excuse from the obligation of Sunday rest. The faithful should see to it that legitimate excuses do not lead to habits prejudicial to religion, family life, and health.(2185).

On these days, Christians traditionally devote time and care to their families and relatives, especially the aged parents, which may be difficult to do on other days. They are also encouraged to take additional time for reflection, prayer, cultivation of the mind, and silence. "Those Christians who have leisure should be mindful of their brethren who have the same needs and the same rights, yet cannot rest from work because of poverty and misery. Sunday is traditionally consecrated by Christian piety to good works and humble service of the sick, the infirm, and the elderly. Christians will also sanctify Sunday by devoting time and care to their families and relatives, often difficult to do on other days of the week. Sunday is a time for reflection, silence, cultivation of the mind, and meditation which furthers the growth of the Christian interior life" (2186)