

As I mentioned last week, to help all of us here have eternal life, I would like to start preaching about the Ten Commandments for several weeks, starting today. I think it's good to review them from time to time.

"Oh, oh," some of you may be thinking. Father Bart is going to start preaching about fire and brimstone. No, I'm not. The Ten Commandments are not about fire and brimstone. They are about how to love. They are about love of God and love of our neighbor.

Some people think we don't need the Ten Commandments any more. They think all we need to do is love each other. But what is love? Part of love is keeping the Commandments. Jesus said, **"If you love me, you will keep my commandments."**

The first three Commandments are about how to love God. The fourth through tenth Commandments are about how to love our neighbor. Do we want to learn more about how to love? Then let's listen up.

The Ten Commandments are listed in two places in the Old Testament, in the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy. Here's the First Commandment: **"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments."**

To make this First Commandment easier to remember, it's often abbreviated, something like, **"I am the LORD your God: you shall not have strange Gods before me."**

Let's look at this commandment more closely, using the full version. The first part of it is, **I am the LORD your God.** You might wonder why the words **"LORD"** and **"God"** are both in there. After all, don't they mean the same thing? Not in this case. When you read the Old Testament, in most English translations, you'll notice that the word "Lord" is sometimes all capital letters, and other times it's not. When it's not, it translates the Hebrew word "Adonai," which means simply "Lord," in other words, someone with great authority and power, a master, a ruler.

When "LORD" is all capital letters, it stands for God's personal name that He revealed to Moses. The letters of it in English are "YHWH." The Jews considered this name too holy to pronounce. Here in the First Commandment, "LORD" is capitalized. God is using his Personal name. He wants a personal relationship with us.

God goes on to say, **"Who brought you out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me."** He is reminding them that He is their Rescuer, their Savior, that

He loves them. He's also emphasizing that He's different from all the gods that other people believed in and worshipped. They either don't exist, or are demons. God is saying, "Don't waste your time or get in trouble worshipping them!"

One interesting thing in this phrase is that when God says, "**I am the LORD your God,**" the word "**your**" is in the singular. Even though He's addressing all the people of Israel. In other words, He has a relationship with each person. A unique relationship, a close, loving and family relationship. God wants to be the Lord of each one of us.

Then God goes on to say, "**You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them...**" In other words, don't worship images. Don't have idols. Worship me alone.

Why does God say this? Is it because He has a big ego and wants the flattery? Or because He has low self-esteem and wants a boost? No...God doesn't need our worship. We need to worship Him. Our worship of God perfects us.

"I am the LORD your God: you shall not have strange Gods before me." What are some ways we could sin against this commandment?

- Involvement in occult practices. These include witchcraft, Ouija boards, séances, palm reading, tarot cards, consulting psychics, hypnotism, divination, astrology, black magic, and sorcery.
- Involvement in New Age beliefs, Eastern non-Christian philosophies, atheism or agnosticism.
- Apostasy—in other words, publically leaving the Church.
- Schism—in other words, refusing to be under the authority of the bishop and/or the Pope.
- Putting faith in superstition, including horoscopes or good luck charms.
- Joining the Masons or other secret societies.
- Receiving Holy Communion in the state of mortal sin, or receiving the Sacraments of Confirmation or Matrimony while in the state of mortal sin.
- If we are Catholic, getting married by a justice of the peace or non-Catholic minister, without getting a dispensation from the Catholic Church to do so.
- Involvement in false or pagan worship.

- Willfully denying the faith of the Catholic Church.
- Despairing of God's grace or mercy.
- Presumption, in other words, thinking you can be forgiven without being sorry for your sins, or that you can get to heaven without God's help.
- Hatred of God.
- Simony, in other words, buying or selling spiritual things.
- Desecration of the Holy Eucharist, in other words, deliberately mistreating the Body or Blood of Christ.
- Failure to receive Holy Communion at least once a year.
- Persisting in sin without trying to overcome it.
- Neglecting opportunities to learn more about our faith.
- Neglecting to pray to God.
- Being willfully distracted in prayer.
- Putting other things ahead of God, like money, prestige, or pleasure.

If we do any of these things, we are breaking the First Commandment. We are falling short in our love for God. If we fall short in our love for God, we can't reach Him. That's because we reach God not by the steps of our feet, but by the affections of our heart.

So let's lift up our hearts to the Lord, and say what the tax collector said: **"O God, be merciful to me a sinner."** If we do that, God *will* lift us up.

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