

Ten After Ten Session 98: The Ten Commandments

2052 “Teacher, what good deed must I do, to have eternal life?” To the young man who asked this question... Jesus tells him: “If you would enter life, keep the commandments.”

2053 To this first reply Jesus adds a second: “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.” This reply does not do away with the first: following Jesus Christ involves keeping the Commandments.

2054 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 Pharisees” as well as that of the Gentiles... “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.”

2055 When someone asks 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.” The Decalogue must be interpreted in light of this twofold yet single commandment of love.

2056 The word “Decalogue” means literally “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 by Moses. They are pre-eminently the words of God.

2057 Whether formulated as negative commandments, prohibitions, or as positive precepts such as: “Honor your father and mother,” the “ten words” point out the conditions of a life freed from the slavery of sin. The Decalogue is a path of life.

2058 The “ten words” sum up and proclaim God’s law... These “tablets of the Testimony” were to be deposited in the ark.

2059 The “ten words” are pronounced by God in the midst of a theophany. 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.

2060 The gift of the commandments and of the Law is part of the covenant God sealed with his own. 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.

2061 The Commandments take on their full meaning within the covenant. According to Scripture, man’s moral life has all its meaning in and through the covenant.

2062 The Commandments...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 in history.

2063 The covenant and dialogue between God and man are also attested to by the fact that all the obligations are stated in the first person (“I am the Lord.”) and addressed by God to another personal subject (“you”)... God makes his will known to each person in particular, at the same time as he makes it known to the whole people.

2064 In fidelity to Scripture and in conformity with the example of Jesus, the tradition of the Church has acknowledged the primordial importance and significance of the Decalogue.

2065 Ever since St. Augustine, the Ten Commandments have occupied a predominant place in the catechesis of baptismal candidates and the faithful.

2066 The division and numbering of the Commandments have varied in the course of history. The present catechism follows the division of the Commandments established by St. Augustine, which has become traditional in the Catholic Church.

2067 The Ten Commandments state what is required in the love of God and love of neighbor. The first three concern love of God, and the other seven love of neighbor.

2068 The Council of Trent teaches that the Ten Commandments are obligatory for Christians and that the justified man is still bound to keep them.

2069 The Decalogue forms a coherent whole. Each “word” refers to each of the others and to all of them; they reciprocally condition one another. The two tablets shed light on one another; they form an organic unity. To transgress one commandment is to infringe all the others.

2070 The Ten Commandments belong to God’s revelation. At the same time they teach us the true humanity of man... The Decalogue contains a privileged expression of the natural law.

2071 The commandments of the Decalogue, although accessible to reason alone, have been revealed. To attain a complete and certain understanding of the requirements of the natural law, sinful humanity needed this revelation.

2072 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.

2073 Obedience to the Commandments also implies obligations in matter which is, in itself, light. Thus abusive language is forbidden by the fifth commandment, but would be a grave offense only as a result of circumstances or the offender’s intention.

2074 When we believe in Jesus Christ, partake of his mysteries, and keep his commandments, the Savior himself comes to love, in us, his Father and his brethren, our Father and our brethren. His person becomes, through the Spirit, the living and interior rule of our activity.