

Ten After Ten Session 121: The Tenth Commandment

“You shall not covet...your neighbor’s house, his field, or his manservant, or his maidservant, or his ox, or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor’s.”

2534 The tenth commandment unfolds and completes the ninth, which is concerned with concupiscence of the flesh. It forbids coveting the goods of another, as the root of theft, robbery, and fraud, which the seventh commandment forbids...The tenth commandment concerns the intentions of the heart; with the ninth, it summarizes all the precepts of the Law.

2535 The sensitive appetite leads us to desire pleasant things we do not have, e.g., the desire to eat when we are hungry or to warm ourselves when we are cold. These desires are good in themselves; but often they exceed the limits of reason and drive us to covet unjustly what is not ours and belongs to another or is owed to him.

2536 The tenth commandment forbids greed and the desire to amass earthly goods without limit. It forbids avarice arising from a passion for riches and their attendant power. It also forbids the desire to commit injustice by harming our neighbor in his temporal goods.

2537 It is not a violation of this commandment to desire to obtain things that belong to one’s neighbor, provided this is done by just means. Traditional catechesis realistically mentions...those who “must be urged the more to keep this commandment”:

---merchants who desire scarcity and rising prices; those who hope that their peers will be impoverished, in order to realize a profit either by selling to them or buying from them; physicians who wish disease to spread; lawyers who are eager for many cases and trials.

2538 The tenth commandment requires that envy be banished from the human heart...Envy can lead to the worst crimes.

2539 Envy is a capital sin. It refers to the sadness at the sight of another’s goods and the immoderate desire to acquire them for oneself, even unjustly. When it wishes grave harm to a neighbor it is a mortal sin.

2540 Envy represents a form of sadness and therefore a refusal of charity; the baptized person should struggle against it by exercising good will. Envy often comes from pride; the baptized person should train himself to live in humility.

2541 The economy of law and grace turns men’s hearts away from avarice and envy. It initiates them into desire for the Sovereign Good; it instructs them in the desires of the Holy Spirit who satisfies man’s heart.

2542 The gap between wanting and doing points to the conflict between God’s Law which is the “law of my mind,” and another law “making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members.”

2543 “But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all

who believe.” Henceforth, Christ’s faithful “have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires”; they are led by the Spirit and follow the desires of the Spirit.

2544 Jesus enjoins his disciples to prefer him to everything and everyone, and bids them “renounce all that [they have]” for his sake and that of the Gospel... The precept of detachment from riches is obligatory for entrance into the Kingdom of heaven.

2545 All Christ’s faithful are to direct their affections rightly, lest they be hindered in their pursuit of perfect charity by the use of worldly things and by an adherence to riches which is contrary to the spirit of evangelical poverty.

2546 The Beatitudes reveal an order of happiness and grace, of beauty and peace. Jesus celebrates the joy of the poor, to whom the Kingdom already belongs.

2547 Abandonment to the providence of the Father in heaven frees us from anxiety about tomorrow. Trust in God is a preparation for the blessedness of the poor. They shall see God.

2548 Desire for true happiness frees man from his immoderate attachment to the goods of this world so that he can find his fulfillment in the vision and beatitude of God... Whoever sees God has obtained all the goods of which he can conceive.

2549 It remains for the holy people to struggle, with grace from on high, to obtain the good things God promises. In order to possess and contemplate God, Christ’s faithful mortify their cravings and, with the grace of God, prevail over the seductions of pleasure and power.

2550 On this way of perfection, the Spirit and the Bride call whoever hears them to perfect communion with God:

God himself will be the goal of our desires; we shall contemplate him without end, love him without surfeit, praise him without weariness. This gift, this state, this act, like eternal life itself, will assuredly be common to all.