



# **THE FIRST COMMANDMENT**

## ***1. “You shall worship the Lord your God”***

### **Texts from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church***

*“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.” (Ex 20:2-5)*

*It is written: “You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.” (Mt 4:10)*

#### **The commandment to love God**

Jesus summed up man’s duties toward God in this saying: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength”. (Mt 22:37; Lk 10:27) This immediately echoes the solemn call: “Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God is one LORD.” (Dt 6:42) 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. (2083)

#### **“YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD “**

God makes himself known by recalling his all-powerful, loving and liberating action in the history of the one he addresses: “I brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.” The first word contains the first commandment of the Law: “You shall fear the LORD your God; you shall serve him... You shall not go after other gods.” (Dt 6:13-14) God’s first call and just demand is that man accept him and worship him. (2084)

The one and true God first reveals his glory to Israel. The revelation of the vocation and truth of man is linked to the revelation of God. Man’s vocation is to make God manifest by acting in conformity with his creation “in the image and likeness of God”. (2085)

#### **The duty to believe, to hope and to love God**

“The first commandment embraces faith, hope and charity. 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. He is almighty, merciful and infinitely beneficent... Who could not place all hope in him? 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’.” (The Roman Catechism) (2086)

#### **Faith**

Our moral life has its source in faith in God who reveals his love to us. St. Paul speaks of the “obedience of faith” as our first obligation. He shows that “ignorance of God” is the principle and explanation of all moral deviations. (Rom 1:5; 16:26) Our duty toward God is to believe in him and to bear witness to him. The first commandment requires us to nourish and protect our faith with prudence and vigilance, and to reject everything that is opposed to it. There are various ways of sinning against faith:

- \* *Voluntary doubt* about the faith disregards or refuses to hold as true what God has revealed and the Church proposes for belief.
- \* *Involuntary doubt* refers to hesitation in believing, difficulty in overcoming objections connected with the faith, or also anxiety aroused by its obscurity. If deliberately cultivated doubt can lead to spiritual blindness. (2088)
- \* *Incredulity* is the neglect of revealed truth or the wilful refusal to assent to it.
- \* *Heresy* is the obstinate post-baptismal denial of some truth which must be believed with divine and catholic faith, or it is likewise an obstinate doubt concerning the same.
- \* *Apostasy* is the total repudiation of the Christian faith.
- \* *Schism* is the refusal of submission to the Roman Pontiff or of communion with the members of the Church subject to him. (2087-2089)

#### **Hope**

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. The first commandment is also concerned with sins against hope:

- \* *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. (2090-2091)
- \* There are two kinds of *presumption*. Either man presumes upon his own capacities, (hoping to be able to save himself without help from on high), or he presumes upon God’s almighty power or his mercy (hoping to obtain his forgiveness without conversion, and glory without merit). (2092)

#### **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. One can sin against God’s love in various ways: (2093)

- \* *Indifference* neglects or refuses to reflect on divine charity; it fails to consider its preventive goodness and denies its power.
- \* *Ingratitude* fails or refuses to acknowledge divine charity and to return him love for love.
- \* *Lukewarmness* is hesitation or negligence in responding to divine love; it can imply refusal to give oneself over to the prompting of charity.
- \* *Acedia* or spiritual sloth goes so far as to refuse the joy that comes from God and to be repelled by divine goodness.
- \* *Hatred of God* comes from pride. It is contrary to love of God, whose goodness it denies, and whom it presumes to curse as the one who forbids sins and inflicts punishments. (2093-2094)

## **“HIM ONLY SHALL YOU SERVE”**

The theological virtues of faith, hope and charity inform and give life to the moral virtues. Thus charity leads us to render to God what we as creatures owe him in all justice. The virtue of religion disposes us to have this attitude. (2095)

### **Adoration**

Adoration is the first act of the virtue of religion. To adore God is to acknowledge him as God, as the Creator and Saviour, 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*. (Lk 4:8; cf. Dt 6:13) (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)

### **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.” (Lk 18:1) (2098)

### **Sacrifice**

It is right to offer sacrifice to God as a sign of adoration and gratitude, supplication and communion: “Every action done so as to cling to God in communion of holiness, and thus achieve blessedness, is a true sacrifice.” (St. Augustine) (2099)

Outward sacrifice, to be genuine, must be the expression of spiritual sacrifice: “The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit...” (Ps 51:17) The only perfect sacrifice is the one that Christ offered on the cross as a total offering to the Father’s love and for our salvation. By uniting ourselves with his sacrifice we can make our lives a sacrifice to God. (2100)

### **Promises and vows**

In many circumstances, the Christian is called 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 this action, that prayer, this alms-giving, that pilgrimage, and so forth. Fidelity to promises made to God is a sign of the respect owed to the divine majesty and of love for a faithful God. (2101)

A *vow* is a deliberate and free promise made to God concerning a possible and better good which must be fulfilled by reason of the virtue of religion. A vow is an *act of devotion* in which the Christian dedicates himself to God or promises him some good work. By fulfilling his vows he renders to God what has been promised and consecrated to Him. (2102)

The Church recognizes an exemplary value in the vows to practice the *evangelical counsels*:

“Mother Church rejoices that she has within herself many men and women who pursue the Saviour’s self-emptying more closely and show it forth more clearly, by undertaking poverty with the freedom of the children of God, and renouncing their own will: they submit themselves to man for the sake of God, thus going beyond what is of precept in the matter of perfection, so as to conform themselves more fully to the obedient Christ.” (Vatican II, The Church) (2103)

### **The social duty of religion and the right to religious freedom**

All men are bound to seek the truth, especially in what concerns God and his Church, and to embrace it and hold on to it as they come to know it. This duty derives from “the very dignity of the human person”. It does not contradict a sincere respect for different religions which frequently reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men, nor the requirement of charity, which urges Christians to treat with love, prudence and patience those who are in error or ignorance with regard to the faith. (2104)

The duty of offering God genuine worship concerns man both individually and socially. This is the traditional Catholic teaching on the moral duty of individuals and societies toward the true religion and the one Church of Christ. The social duty of Christians is to respect and awaken in each man the love of the true and the good. It requires them to make known the worship of the one true religion which subsists in the Catholic and apostolic Church. Thus, the Church shows forth the kingship of Christ over all creation and in particular over human societies. (2105)

Nobody may be forced to act against his convictions, nor is anyone to be restrained from acting in accordance with his conscience in religious matters in private or in public, alone or in association with others, within due limits. This right is based on the very nature of the human person, whose dignity enables him freely to assent to the divine truth which transcends the temporal order. (2106)

The right to religious liberty is neither a moral licence to adhere to error, nor a supposed right to error, but rather a natural right of the human person to civil liberty, i.e., immunity, within just limits, from external constraint in religious matters by political authorities. (2108)

### **IN BRIEF**

- **“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your strength.” (Dt 6:5). (2133)**
- **The first commandment summons man to believe in God, to hope in him and to love him above all else. (2134)**
- **“You shall worship the LORD your God.” (Mt 4:10) Adoring God, praying to him, offering him the worship that belongs to him, fulfilling the promises and vows made to him, are acts of the virtue of religion which fall under obedience to the first commandment. (2135)**
- **The duty to offer God authentic worship concerns man both as an individual and as a social being. (2136)**
- **“Men of the present day want to profess their religion freely in private and in public”. (2137)**

