

LESSON THIRTIETH.

ON THE FIRST COMMANDMENT.

315 Q. What is the first Commandment?

A. The first Commandment is: "I am the Lord thy God: thou shalt not have strange gods before Me."

"Strange gods." The Israelites were surrounded on all sides by pagan nations who worshipped idols and false gods, and sometimes by mingling with these people they fell into sin, and, forgetting the true God, worshipped their idols. Sometimes, too, they were at war with these pagan nations, and when defeated were led captive into pagan countries and there fell into the sin of worshipping false gods. It was against this sin that God cautioned His people in the first commandment. From this sin of idolatry among the Israelites we have an example of the evil results of associating with persons not of the true religion. One would think that the Israelites, knowing the true God, might have converted their pagan neighbors to the true religion by the influence of their teaching and example; but, on the contrary, they lost the true faith themselves, as nearly always happens in such cases. How do we sometimes worship false or strange gods? By making dress, money, honor, society, company, or pleasure our god—that is, by giving up the worship of God and sinning for their sake; and thus making them god, at least for the time being, by giving them our heart, mind, and service.

* 316 Q. How does the first Commandment help us to keep the great Commandment of the love of God?

A. The first Commandment helps us to keep the great Commandment of the love of God because it commands us to adore God alone.

317 Q. How do we adore God?

A. We adore God by faith, hope, and charity, by prayer and sacrifice.

318 Q. How may the first Commandment be broken?

A. The first Commandment may be broken by giving to a creature the honor which belongs to God alone; by false worship; and by attributing to a creature a perfection which belongs to God alone.

“**Creature**”—that is, anything created; anything but God Himself; for all other persons and things have been created. If one knelt before a king and adored him, he would be giving to a creature the honor due to God alone. “**False worship**”—that is, worshipping God not as He directs us by His Church, but in some way pleasing to ourselves. For example, to sacrifice animals to God would now be false worship; to offer now any of the sacrifices commanded in the Old Law would be false worship, because all these were figures of the real sacrifice of the cross and Mass, and were to put the people in mind that one day Christ the promised Redeemer would offer up the one great sacrifice of His own body and blood to blot out all the sins of the world. And now that we have the real sacrifice it would be sinful to use only figures, and it would be a false worship displeasing to God. So, too, all those who leave the true Church to practise a religion of their own have a false worship, for they worship God not as He wishes, but as they wish.

Heaven is a reward, and when we see how the saints labored to secure it we must be ashamed of the little we do for God. Take out of a whole year—that is, 365 days or 8,760 hours—the time you give to the service of God, and you will find it very little. Even the time you spent at Mass and prayers was filled with distraction and little of it entirely given to God. Since this is true for one year, what will it be for all the years of your life? Think of them all and you will perceive that God, Who gave you all the time you had, and Who on the last day will demand an exact account of it,

will find very little of it spent in His honor or in His service. Even the time wasted in school and instructions will all stand against you. Time lost is lost forever, and you can never make it up. Next to grace, time is the most valuable thing God gives us, and we should use it well. “**Attributing to a creature a perfection,**” etc. Persons who go to fortune-tellers do this. Fortune-tellers are persons who pretend to know what is going to happen in the future. We know from our religion that only God Himself knows the future. Neither the angels nor saints, nor even the Blessed Virgin, know the future. Even they could not tell your fortune unless God revealed it to them. So when you go to a fortune-teller you place the poor sinful person who is doing the devil’s work above the Blessed Virgin and all the saints and angels, and make that wretch equal to God Himself. Surely this is a sin, even if you do not believe these so-called fortune-tellers, but go to them merely through curiosity or with others. Again, we pay these persons for telling us some foolish nonsense, and thus encourage them to continue their sinful business. They doubtless laugh at the foolishness of those who go to them or believe what they say, and pay them generously. You might with as much sense stop a man on the street, ask him to tell your fortune, and hand him your money, for he would know as much about it as so-called fortune-tellers do. Rarely these sinful people might tell you something that has happened in your life; but if they do, they merely guess at it or are aided by the devil. The devil did not lose his intelligence when driven out of heaven, and he uses it now for doing evil. He has vast experience, for he is as old as Adam, or older, and has seen and known all the men that have lived in the world. He can move rapidly through the world and easily know what is visibly taking place, so that, strictly speaking, he could make known to his sinful agents what is present or past, but never the future. Thus some fortune-tellers, clairvoyants, mind-readers, mediums, or whatever else they call themselves, who are truly in league with the devil, may by his power tell you

the past of your life to make you believe that they know also the future. The past and present in your life you already know, and the future they cannot tell ; therefore it is useless as well as sinful to go to them. I say only it is possible for some fortune-tellers to employ the assistance of the devil, for all of them, with very rare exception, are clever impostors who take your money for guessing at what they suspect you will be most pleased to hear.

* 319 Q. Do those who make use of spells and charms, or who believe in dreams, in mediums, spiritists, fortune-tellers, and the like, sin against the first Commandment?

A. Those who make use of spells and charms, or who believe in dreams, in mediums, spiritists, fortune-tellers, and the like, sin against the first Commandment, because they attribute to creatures perfections which belong to God alone.

“**Spells**” are certain words, the saying of which persons believe will effect for them something wonderful—a miraculous cure, for instance, or protection from some evil. “**Charms**” are articles worn about the body for the same purpose. They may be little black beans, little stones of a certain shape, the teeth of animals, etc. In uncivilized countries the inhabitants use many of these charms. But you may ask, Are not these medals, scapulars, etc., that we wear, also charms? No. These things are blessed and worn in honor of God, of His blessed Mother, or of the saints. We do not expect any help from the little piece of brass or cloth we wear, but from those in whose honor we wear it, and from the prayers said in the blessing for those who wear it. But they who wear charms expect the help from the thing itself, which makes their conduct foolish and sinful, since God alone can protect from evil. Again, such things as medals, crosses, and scapulars are blessed by the Church and worn by its consent, and it could never allow all its children to do a sinful thing. It is good and praiseworthy, therefore, to wear the

blessed sacramentals in God's honor; but even with these holy things we must be careful not to go too far. It is true the Blessed Virgin will protect those who wear her scapular; but **it** would be sinful wilfully to expose ourselves to danger **without** any necessity, because we wear a scapular. Thus it would be suicide for a boy who could not swim to plunge into deep water because, having his scapulars on, the Blessed Virgin ought to save him by a miracle. Again, it is wrong to look for miracles from God when natural help will answer. Thus it would be wrong for a man who broke his leg to refuse to have the doctors set it, because he wanted God alone to heal it. "**Dreams**" are caused by the mind being at work while the body is sleeping or at rest. The mind never sleeps; it is always awake and working. Thus when we are asleep the imagination, without the reason to guide it, mixes together a number of things we have seen, heard, or thought of, and gives us strange scenes and pictures. Sometimes what we dream of seems to happen; but that is only because we dream so much that it would be strange if none of the things ever happened. We will generally dream about whatever was on our mind shortly before. We read in the Holy Scriptures that God at times made known His will to certain persons by dreams; as when the king of Egypt dreamt of the great famine that was to come; or when the angel appeared in sleep to St. Joseph, telling him to take Our Lord into Egypt, where Herod the king could not kill him (Matt. ii.).

The dreams mentioned in the Holy Scripture were more frequently visions than dreams. In a vision the things we see are really present, whereas in dreams they are not, but we imagine they are. God no longer makes use of dreams as a means of communicating with His creatures, because His Church will make known to us His will. He sometimes, however, makes known certain things to His holy servants on earth in a very special and private manner; as, for example, when Our Lord appeared to Blessed Margaret Mary and told her He would like to have the devotion to the Sacred Heart established. We must always believe what the Church tells

as God has made known to it; but when holy people tell us that God revealed special things to them, we are not obliged to believe what they say, unless the Church confirms it. I say we are not obliged—that is, we may if we please; but we would not be heretics and commit sin if we did not believe all the revelations and wonderful things we find recorded in the lives of saints, though they may all be true.

“**Mediums and spiritists**” are persons who pretend they can talk with the dead in the other world, and learn where they are and what they are doing. They have figures to move and apparently speak, and other contrivances to deceive those who confide in them. Their work is all deception and very sinful. If any of these things could be done, or if God wished them to be known, He would give the power to the Church founded by His divine Son, and not to a few sinful men or women here and there. After a soul leaves the body its fate is hidden from us, and we can say nothing with absolute certainty of its reward or punishment. No one ever came back from the other world to give a minute account of its general appearance or of what takes place there. All that is known about it the Church knows and tells us, and all over and above that is false or doubtful. By thinking a little you can see how all these dealings with fortune-tellers, etc., are giving to creatures what belongs to God alone.

320 Q. Are sins against faith, hope, and charity also sins against the first Commandment?

A. Sins against faith, hope, and charity are also sins against the first Commandment.

321 Q. How does a person sin against faith?

A. A person sins against faith, first, by not trying to know what God has taught; second, by refusing to believe all that God has taught; third, by neglecting to profess his belief in what God has taught.

“**Not trying to know.**” Thus children who idle their time at Sunday-school or religious instruction, and do not

learn their Catechism, sin against faith in the first way. In like manner grown persons who do not sometime or other endeavor to hear sermons or instructions, to attend missions or learn from good books, sin against faith. “**Refusing to believe,**” as all those do who leave the true religion, or who, knowing it, do not embrace it. “**Neglecting to profess.**” We may do this by not living up to the practice of our holy religion. We believe, for example, we should hear Mass every Sunday and holy-day; we should receive the sacraments at certain times in the year; but if we only believe these things and do not do them, we neglect to profess our faith; neglect to show others that we really believe all the Church teaches, and are anxious to practise it. Many know and believe what they should do, but never practise it. Such persons do great injury to the Church, for persons who do not live up to their holy religion but act contrary to its teaching give scandal to their neighbor. How many persons at present not Catholics would be induced to enter the true Church if they saw all Catholics virtuous, truthful, sober, honest, upright, and industrious! But when they see Catholics—be they ever so few—cursing, quarrelling, backbiting, drinking, lying, stealing, cheating, etc.—in a word, indulging in the same vices as those who claim to have no religion, what must they think of the moral influence of Catholic faith? Thus they do great injustice to the Church and the cause of religion, and are working against our blessed Lord when they should be working for Him.

The Christian religion spread very rapidly through the world in the first ages of its existence; and one of the chief reasons was the good example given by the Christians; for pagans seeing the holy lives, the kindness and charity of their Christian neighbors, could not help admiring and loving them, and wishing to be members of the Church that made them so good and amiable. How many pagans do you think would be converted nowadays by the lives of some who call themselves Catholics? Not many, I think. Besides this, the

early Christians really labored to instruct others in the Christian religion, and to make them converts. Often we find servants—even slaves—by their instructions converting their pagan masters and mistresses. They all felt that they were missionaries working for Jesus Christ, and their influence reached where the priest's influence could not reach, because they came in contact with persons the priests never had an opportunity of seeing. If all Catholics had the same spirit, what good they could do ! Their business or duty may often bring them into daily intercourse with persons not of their faith, and who never knew or perhaps heard any of the beautiful truths of our holy religion. Yes, Catholics could do much good if they had only the good will and knew their religion well. I do not mean that they should be always discussing religion with every one they meet. Let them preach chiefly by the example of their own good lives, and when questioned explain modestly and sincerely the truths they believe.

If you should be asked, for instance: Why do you not eat flesh-meat on Friday ? you should be able to answer: "Because I am a Christian and wish to keep always before my mind how our blessed Lord suffered for me in His holy flesh on that day; and anyone who claims to be a Christian, ought, I think, to be glad to do what reminds him so regularly and well of Our Lord's passion." Such an answer if given kindly and mildly would silence and instruct your adversary; it might make him reflect, and might, in time, bring him to the true religion. Sometimes a few words make a great impression and bring about conversion. St. Francis Xavier was a worldly young man, learned and ambitious, and he heard from St. Ignatius these words of Our Lord: "What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his own soul?" He went home and kept thinking of them till they impressed him so strongly that he gave up the world, became a priest and by his labors and preaching in India, converted to the true religion many thousand pagans. In the lives of the saints there are many examples of a few

words, by God's grace, bringing men from a life of sin to a life of great holiness.

* 322 Q. How do we fail to try to know what God has taught?

A. We fail to try to know what God has taught by neglecting to learn the Christian doctrine.

* 323 Q. Who are they who do not believe all that God has taught?

A. They who do not believe all that God has taught are the heretics and infidels.

There are many kinds of unbelievers: atheists, deists, infidels, heretics, apostates, and schismatics. An *atheist* is one who denies the existence of God, saying there is no God. A *deist* is one who says he believes that God exists, but denies that God ever revealed any religion. These are also called freethinkers. An *infidel* properly means one who has never been baptized—one who is not of the number of the faithful; that is, those believing in Christ. Sometimes atheists are called infidels. *Heretics* are those who were baptized and who claim to be Christians, but do not believe all the truths that Our Lord has taught. They accept only a portion of the doctrine of Christ and reject the remainder, and hence they become rebellious children of the Church. They belong to the true Church by being baptized, but do not submit to its teaching and are therefore outcast children, disinherited till they return to the true faith. A *schismatic* is one who believes everything the Church teaches, but will not submit to the authority of its head—the Holy Father. Such persons do not long remain only schismatics; for once they rise up against the authority of the Church, they soon reject some of its doctrines and thus become heretics; and indeed, since the Vatican Council, all schismatics are heretics.

* 324 Q. Who are they who neglect to profess their belief in what God has taught?

A. They who neglect to profess their belief in what

God has taught are all those who fail to acknowledge the true Church in which they really believe.

There are some outside the Church who feel and believe that the Catholic Church is the true Church, and yet they do not become Catholics, because there are so many difficulties in the way. For example, they have been brought up in another religion, and all their friends, relatives, or associates are opposed to the Catholic religion. Their business, their social life, their worldly interests will all suffer if they become Catholics. So, although they feel they should at once embrace the true religion, they keep putting off till death comes and finds them outside the Church—and most probably guilty of other mortal sins. Such persons cannot be saved, for they reject all the graces God bestows upon them. A very common fault with such people is to excuse this conduct by saying: Oh! I was brought up in the Protestant religion, and every one ought to live in the religion in which he was brought up. Let me ask: If persons were brought up with some bodily deformity that their parents neglected to have remedied while they were young, would they not use every means themselves to have the deformity removed as soon as they became old enough to see and understand their misfortune? In like manner, if unfortunately parents bring up their children in a false religion, that is, with spiritual deformities, it is the duty of the children to embrace the true religion as soon as they know it. Again persons will say: Oh, I believe one religion as good as another; we are all Christians, and all trying to serve God. If one religion is as good as another, why did not Our Lord allow the old religions—false or true—to remain? If one man says a thing is black and another says it is white, they cannot both be right, for a thing cannot be black and white at the same time. Only one can be right; and, if we are anxious about the color of the object, we must try to find which one is right. Just in the same way all the religions that claim to be Christian contradict one another; one says a thing is false and another says it is true;

one says Our Lord taught so and so and another says He did not. Now since it is very important for us to know which is right, we must find out which is really the Church Our Lord established; and when we have found it we will know that all the other pretended Christian religions must be false. Our Lord has given us marks by which we can know His Church, as we saw while speaking of the marks of the Church; and the Roman Catholic Church is the only Church that has all these marks. We say that we are Roman Catholics to show that we are in communion with the Church of Rome, established by St. Peter, the chief of the apostles.

* 325 Q. Can they who fail to profess their faith in the true Church in which they believe expect to be saved while in that state?

A. They who fail to profess their faith in the true Church in which they believe cannot expect to be saved while in that state, for Christ has said: "Whoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father Who is in heaven."

326 Q. Are we obliged to make open profession of our faith?

A. We are obliged to make open profession of our faith as often as God's honor, our neighbor's spiritual good, or our own requires it. "Whosoever," says Christ, "shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father Who is in heaven."

It is not necessary for us to proclaim in the streets that we are Catholics; neither need we tell our religion to impudent people that may ask us only to insult us; but when a real need of professing our faith presents itself, then we must profess it. Suppose you are stopping in a hotel in which you are the only Catholic. If flesh-meat is placed before you on Friday you must quietly push it aside and ask for fish or other food; although by so doing you will show that you are a Catholic and make a silent profession of your faith. God's honor and your own good require it, for you must keep the

laws of God and of His Church on every possible occasion. Suppose again there were in the same hotel some indifferent Catholics, socially your equals or inferiors, who through human respect were ashamed to go to Mass on Sunday; then you should publicly go to Mass and even declare that you must go, for by so doing you would encourage these indifferent Catholics to follow your example. In that case your neighbor's good requires that you profess your faith. In a word, you must keep up the practice of your religion even if by so doing you have to make an open profession of your faith and suffer for it. But suppose it is something that God or the Church does not command you to do but only recommends, such as blessing yourself before meals or some pious practice, you could in public omit such an action if you pleased without any sin or denial of faith, because you violate no law.

327 Q. Which are the sins against hope?

A. The sins against hope are presumption and despair.

328 Q. What is presumption?

A. Presumption is a rash expectation of salvation without making proper use of the necessary means to obtain it.

A person who goes on leading a bad life, and says when warned of his danger, that he is in no hurry to reform; that he will repent some day before he dies, is always living in and committing the sin of presumption. It is a great sin, for it is living in open defiance of Almighty God. Such persons are very seldom given the opportunity to repent at the last moment, and are, in most cases, called to judgment when they least expect it. We are all presumptuous sometimes. Do we not often, when we have fallen into a certain sin, easily repeat the act, saying to ourselves, now that we will have to confess the sin committed, the mention of the number of times will not make much difference for it will not increase

our shame and confusion? This is presumption; for we do not know whether God will ever give us the opportunity of making a confession. Again, one mortal sin is sufficient to keep our souls in hell for all eternity; what then will be our punishment for many mortal sins? Then there is another thing you should remember: God has fixed a certain number of sins that He will suffer you to commit before He sends His punishment. You do not know which sin will complete the number and be the last. The very sin you are now about to commit may be that one, and the moment you have committed it, God will call you to judgment, whether it be night or day, whether you are at home or in the streets—though perhaps not immediately, but before you commit another sin. Such a thought alone should keep you from sinning. Moreover, after confession you strongly resist the first temptation to mortal sin, but after you have yielded to the first you scarcely make any more resistance, but easily yield again and again. You should therefore, to prevent this, go to confession just as soon as you possibly can after falling into mortal sin. It is bad enough to commit mortal sin, but it is terrible to be living in that state day and night—always an enemy of God—losing the merit of all the works you do and yet you must stay in that state of sin till you go to confession and receive absolution. Peter the apostle committed the sin of presumption (Matt. xxvi.). Our Lord told him to watch and pray for he would be tempted and yield that night, but Peter said: “No Lord, I will never deny Thee.” Instead of begging Our Lord’s help and grace, he trusted to himself and fell miserably into sin. He went into dangerous company and that was another cause of his fall. But afterwards he saw his sin and folly and never ceased to repent of it.

329 Q. What is despair?

A. Despair is the loss of hope in God’s mercy.

Despair is a sin because by it you deny that God is infinitely merciful—that He is **merciful** enough to forgive even

your many and great sins if you are truly sorry for them. Judas committed the sin of despair. After he had betrayed Our Lord, he went and hanged himself, thus committing, besides the sin of betraying his divine Master, two other great sins; namely, despair in God's mercy and suicide. If he had gone to Our Lord and confessed his sin, and implored pardon and promised penance, can we doubt that He would have forgiven even Judas, as He forgave Peter, and those that crucified Him, praying that His Father might not punish them for their sins? Therefore, no matter what sins you have committed, never lose confidence in God's mercy. See how Our Lord pardoned the thief on the cross and Mary Magdalen and other sinners. Be sorry for your sins, and God will hear your prayers. Call upon the Blessed Virgin, your patron saint, and guardian angel to help you, and ask others, especially good persons, to pray for you.

*** 330 Q. How do we sin against the love of God?**

A. We sin against the love of God by all sin, but particularly by mortal sin.