

LESSON THIRTY-SECOND.

FROM THE SECOND TO THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT.

345 Q. What is the second Commandment?

A. The second Commandment is: Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.

“In vain”—that is, without necessity.

346 Q. What are we commanded by the second Commandment?

A. We are commanded by the second Commandment to speak with reverence of God and of the saints, and of all holy things, and to keep our lawful oaths and vows.

A very common sin against this commandment is to use the words and sayings of Holy Scripture in a worldly or bad sense. The Church forbids us to use the words and sayings of Holy Scripture to convey any meaning but the one God intended them to convey, or at least to use them in any but a sacred sense.

347 Q. What is an oath?

A. An oath is the calling upon God to witness the truth of what we say.

We declare a thing to be so or not, and call God to be our witness that we are speaking truly. This is one of the most solemn acts that men can perform in the presence of their fellow-men. All the nations of the earth regard an oath as a most sacred thing, and one who swears falsely is the vilest of men—a perjurer. God is infinite truth and hates lies. What a frightful thing then to call Him to sanction a lie!

* 348 Q. When may we take an oath?

A. We may take an oath when it is ordered by lawful authority or required for God's honor or for our own or our neighbor's good.

An oath is generally taken in a court of law when the judge wishes to find out the truth of the case. We may be a witness against one who is guilty, or in defence of an innocent person, and in such cases a lie would have most evil consequences. The judge has a right, therefore, to make us take an oath that we will testify truly. Officers of the law, magistrates, judges, etc., take an oath when entering upon their duties that they will perform them faithfully.

* 349 Q. What is necessary to make an oath lawful?

A. To make an oath lawful it is necessary that what we swear be true, and that there be a sufficient cause for taking an oath.

350 Q. What is a vow?

A. A vow is a deliberate promise made to God to do something that is pleasing to Him.

“Deliberate”—that is, with full consent and freedom. If we are forced to make it, it is not valid. “To God,” not to another; though we may vow to God that we will do something in honor of the Blessed Virgin, or of the saints, or for another. “Something pleasing,” because if we promise something that is forbidden by God or displeasing to Him, it is not a vow. A solemn promise, for instance, to kill your neighbor or steal his goods could not be a vow. You would commit a sin by making such a vow, and another by keeping it, for if you promise something you cannot do without committing sin then you must not keep that promise. We have an example in the life of St. John the Baptist. King Herod was leading a sinful life; and St. John rebuked him for it. The wife of the king's brother—Herodias was her name—hated St. John for this, and she sought to have him killed. Once when the king had a great feast and all his nobles were assembled, this

woman's daughter danced before them, and the king was so pleased with her that he vowed to give her whatever she asked. He should have said, if it is something pleasing to God, but he did not. Her mother made her ask for the head of John the Baptist. The king was sad, but because he had made the vow or promise he thought he had to keep it, and ordered St. John to be beheaded and his head brought to her (Matt. xiv.). He was not bound to keep any such vow, and sinned by doing so.

Again, they also commit sin who become members of such secret societies as the Freemasons or similar organizations, promising to do whatever they are ordered without knowing what may be ordered; for they sin not only by obeying sinful commands, but by the very fact of being in a society in which they are exposed to the danger of being forced to sin. Such secret societies are forbidden by the Church because they strive to undermine its authority, and make their rules superior to its teaching. They also influence those in authority to persecute the Church and its ministers, and do not hesitate to recommend even assassination at times for the accomplishment of their ends. Therefore the Church forbids Catholics to join societies of which (1) the objects are unlawful, (2) where the means used are sinful, (3) where the rights of our conscience and liberty are violated by rash or dangerous oaths.

The Church does not oppose associations founded on law and justice; but on the contrary, has always encouraged and still encourages every organization that tends to benefit its members spiritually and temporarily, and opposes only societies that have not a legitimate end. Therefore you may understand that labor unions and benefit societies in which persons are leagued together for their own protection or the protection of their interests are not secret societies, though they may conduct their meetings in secret.

351 Q. Is it a sin not to fulfil our vows?

A. Not to fulfil our vows is a sin, mortal or venial,

according to the nature of the vow and the intention we had in making it.

“Vows”—that is, lawful vows. When a man who is in the habit of getting intoxicated vows not to take liquor for a certain time, he generally intends to bind himself only under venial sin; that is, if he breaks that pledge or promise it will be a venial and not a mortal sin; but he can make it a mortal sin by intending, when he takes the pledge, that if he breaks it he will be guilty of mortal sin.

352 Q. What is forbidden by the second Commandment?

A. The second Commandment forbids all false, rash, unjust, and unnecessary oaths, blasphemy, cursing, and profane words.

“Rash”—swearing a thing is true or false without knowing for certain whether it is or not. **“Blasphemy”** is not the same as cursing or taking God’s name in vain. It is worse. It is to say or do something very disrespectful to God. To say that He is unjust, cruel or the like, is to blaspheme. We can blaspheme also by actions. To defy God by a sign or action, to dare Him to strike us dead, etc., would be blasphemy. We have a terrible example of blasphemy related in the life of Julian the Apostate. An apostate is one who renounces and gives up his religion, not one who merely neglects it. Julian was a Roman emperor and had been a Catholic, but apostatized. Then in his great hatred for Our Lord he wished to falsify His prophecies and prove them untrue. Our Lord had said that of the temple of Jerusalem there would not be left a stone upon a stone. To make this false Julian began to rebuild the temple. In making the preparation he cleared away the ruins of the old building, not leaving a single stone upon a stone, and thus was instrumental himself in verifying the words of Our Lord; for while the ruins remained there were stones upon stones. He wished to defy God, but when he began to build fire came forth from the earth and

drove back the workmen, and a strong wind scattered the materials. Afterwards Julian was wounded in battle, an arrow having pierced his breast. He drew it out, and throwing a handful of his blood toward heaven, said: "Thou hast conquered, O Galilean," meaning Our Lord. This was a horrible blasphemy—throwing his blood in defiance, and calling the Son of God a name which he thought would be insulting (See Fredet's Modern History, Life of Julian). Therefore we can blaspheme by actions or words, doing or saying things intended to insult Almighty God. "Profane words"—that is, bad, but especially irreverent and irreligious words.

353 Q. What is the third Commandment?

A. The third Commandment is: Remember thou keep holy the Sabbath day.

* 354 Q. What are we commanded by the third Commandment?

A. By the third Commandment we are commanded to keep holy the Lord's day and the holy-days of obligation, on which we are to give our time to the service and worship of God.

"Holy-days" we are bound to keep holy just in the same manner we do Sundays—that is, by hearing Mass and refraining from servile works. Those who after hearing Mass must attend to business or work on those days should make this known to their confessor, that he may judge if they have a sufficient excuse for engaging in servile works, and thus they will avoid the danger of sinfully violating an important law. There must always be a good reason for working on a holy-day. Those who are so situated that they can readily refrain from servile work on holy-days must do so. And, where it is possible, the same opportunity must be afforded to their servants.

"Of obligation," because there are some holy-days not of obligation. We celebrate them, but we are not bound under pain of mortal sin to hear Mass or keep from servile works on such days. For example, St. Patrick's Day is not a holy-day of

obligation. The great feast of Corpus Christi is not a holy-day of obligation. Not satisfied with doing only what the Church obliges us to do on Sundays and holy-days, those who really love God will endeavor to do more than the bare works commanded. Sunday is a day of rest and prayer. While we may take innocent and useful amusement, we should not join in any public or noisy entertainments. We may rest and recreate ourselves, but we should avoid every place where vulgar and sometimes sinful amusements, scenes, or plays are presented. Even in taking lawful recreation we may serve God and please Him if we take it to strengthen our bodies that we may be enabled to do the work He has assigned to us in this world.

Sunday is well spent by those who, after hearing Mass, devote some part of the day to good works, such as pious reading, teaching in Sunday-school, bringing relief to the poor and sick, visiting the Blessed Sacrament, attending Vespers, Rosary, etc. Not that I mean they should do nothing but pray on Sundays; but that they should not give the whole day to useless enjoyment or idleness, and forget God. Some begrudge God even the half-hour they are obliged to give to Mass on Sundays: they stand near the door, ready to be the first out, and perhaps were the last in; or they come late, and do not give the full time necessary to hear the entire Mass. Others spend the whole day in reading newspapers, magazines, or useless—I will not say sinful—books. It is not a sin to read daily newspapers, etc., on Sunday; but to give the whole time to them, and never to read anything good and instructive, is a wilful waste of time—and waste of time is sinful. There should be in every family, according to its means, one or more good Catholic newspapers or magazines. Not all papers that bear the name of Catholic are worthy of it. A truly Catholic paper is one that teaches or defends Catholic truth, and warns us against its enemies, their snares, deceptions, etc.; one, too, that tells us what is being done in the interests of religion, education, etc. Besides such a paper there should be a few standard good books in every family; such as the New Testament, the Imi-

tation of Christ, a large and full catechism of Christian Doctrine, etc. On the other hand, all the books in your house need not be books treating of religion or piety. Any book that is not against faith or morals may be kept and read. A book may not be bad in itself, but it may be bad for you, either because it is suggestive of evil, or you misunderstand it, and take evil out of it. In such a case you should not read it. At the present time there are so many bad books that persons should be very careful as to what they read.

Not only should we keep Sunday well ourselves, but we should endeavor to have it so kept by others. We must be careful, however, not to fall into the mistake of some who wish the Sunday to be kept as the Pharisees of old kept the Sabbath, telling us we must not walk, ride, sail, or take any exercise or enjoyment on that day. This is not true, for Our Lord rebuked the Pharisees for such excessive rigor; God made the Sunday for our benefit, and if we had to keep it as they say we must, it would be more of a punishment than a benefit.

355 Q. How are we to worship God on Sundays and holy-days of obligation?

A. We are to worship God on Sundays and holy-days of obligation by hearing Mass, by prayer, and by other good works.

*** 356 Q.** Are the Sabbath day and the Sunday the same?

A. The Sabbath day and the Sunday are not the same. The Sabbath is the seventh day of the week, and is the day which was kept holy in the Old Law; the Sunday is the first day of the week, and is the day which is kept holy in the New Law.

“Old Law” means the law that God gave to the Jews; the New Law, the law that Our Lord gave to Christians.

*** 357 Q.** Why does the Church command us to keep the Sunday holy instead of the Sabbath?

A. The Church commands us to keep the Sunday

holy instead of the Sabbath because on Sunday Christ rose from the dead, and on Sunday He sent the Holy Ghost upon the apostles.

We keep Sunday instead of Saturday also to teach that the Old Law is not now binding upon us, but that we must keep the New Law, which takes its place.

358 Q. What is forbidden by the third Commandment?

A. The third Commandment forbids all unnecessary servile work and whatever else may hinder the due observance of the Lord's day.

359 Q. What are servile works?

A. Servile works are those which require labor rather of body than of mind.

"Servile"—that is, work which was formerly done by the slaves. Therefore writing, reading, studying, etc., are not servile, because they were not the works of slaves.

360 Q. Are servile works on Sunday ever lawful?

A. Servile works are lawful on Sunday when the honor of God, the good of our neighbor, or necessity requires them.

"Honor of God;" for example, erecting an altar that could not be erected at another time, so that the people may hear Mass on that day.

"Good of our neighbor"—such as reconstructing a broken bridge that must be used every day; or clearing away obstacles after a railroad accident, that trains may not be delayed. "Necessity"—firemen endeavoring to extinguish a fire, sailors working on a ship at sea, etc.