



# 1<sup>ST</sup>, 2<sup>ND</sup> & 3<sup>RD</sup> COMMANDMENTS

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“It is written: “You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve.”  
-Matt. 4:10

## Love of God

Traditionally, the first three of the Ten Commandments have been grouped together as those commandments which pertain to love and worship of God (the other seven pertaining to love of neighbor). The first three commandments parallel what Christ said: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind” (Luke 10:27). The first three commandments teach us how we ought to relate to God, what honors and dishonors Him and how we give to Him what is due in justice.

## The First Commandment

*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.*

-Exodus 20:2-5

God’s first call and just demand is that man accepts Him and worships Him. Why does God demand out worship? Is it because He is insecure and *needs* our worship?

No. God commands us to worship Him because in coming to Him we come to our true source, and therein find true and abiding happiness. Man, being made in the image and likeness of God with reason and will, has what the Catechism calls a “vocation to truth” (CCC 2085). Man lives out this vocation by first seeking the truth about God and then acting in conformity with his creation in God’s “image and likeness.”

The first commandment embraces faith, hope and charity. When we confess God, we confess a Being who is constant, unchangeable, faithful, just and without any evil. It follows that we must have faith in what He says, place all hope in Him, and love Him.

## Faith

Our moral life has its source in faith in God who reveals His love to us. Knowledge of God conforms us to His image, while St. Paul says that ignorance of God leads to moral deviations (Rom. 1:18-32). Our duty towards God is to believe in Him and 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.” (CCC 2088). St. Paul tells Timothy, “O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you” (1 Tim. 6:20).

There are various ways of sinning against faith (CCC2087-2089):

- **Voluntary Doubt:** disregarding or refusal to hold as true what God has revealed and the Church proposes for belief.
- **Incredulity:** neglect of revealed truth or willful refusal to assent to it; general skepticism.
- **Heresy:** the obstinate, post-baptismal denial of some truth which must be believed with divine and Catholic faith, or an obstinate doubt concerning the same.
- **Schism:** refusal to submit to the Roman Pontiff or of communion with the members of the Church subject to him.
- **Apostasy:** the total repudiation of the Christian faith.

## Hope

*God is the foundation of hope: not any god, but the God who has a human face and who has loved us to the end, each one of us and humanity in its entirety. His Kingdom is not an imaginary hereafter, situated in a future that will never arrive; his Kingdom is present wherever he is loved and wherever his love reaches us. His love alone gives us the possibility of soberly persevering day by day, without ceasing to be spurred on by hope, in a world which by its very nature is imperfect.*

-Pope Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, 31 (2007)

Hope is the confident expectation of divine blessing and the beatific vision of God. The first commandment also concerns itself with sins against hope: despair and presumption (CCC 2090-92).

- **Despair:** man ceases to hope for his personal salvation. Despair is contrary to God’s justice and His mercy and is a form of pride.
- **Presumption:** there are two kinds of presumption: either man presumes upon his own goodness to save himself without the assistance of God’s grace, or man presumes upon God’s mercy to obtain forgiveness without conversion and glory without merit.

## Charity

Faith in God’s love encompasses the call and the obligation to respond with sincere love to divine charity. One can sin against God’s love in a variety of ways:

- **Indifference:** neglect or refusal to reflect on divine charity; it fails to consider its goodness and denies its power.
- **Ingratitude:** refusal to acknowledge divine charity and to return Him love.
- **Lukewarmness:** negligence in responding to divine love or a refusal to give oneself to the prompting of charity.
- **Acedia:** spiritual sloth; a refusal of the joy that comes from God and going so far as to be repelled by divine goodness. Also, a refusal to exert oneself to do the things necessary to respond to divine grace.
- **Hatred of God:** despising God and denying His goodness. It presumes to curse God as the One who forbids sins and inflicts punishments.

### “Him only shall you serve”

As God alone is all-good, all-powerful and all holy. “And let them know that the Lord is thy name: thou alone art the most High over all the earth.” (Ps. 83:19) Since He alone is God, He alone is worthy of our worship. Charity leads us to render to God what we as creatures owe Him in justice. This is called the *virtue of religion*. There are several acts proper to the virtue of religion:

**Adoration:** When we adore God, we acknowledge Him as God and give Him the glory proper to Him alone as Creator, Savior Lord and Master. This differs from the relative veneration (*dulia*) given to the saints and the special veneration given to Mary (*hyperdulia*). “The worship of God sets man free from turning in on himself, from the slavery of sin and the idolatry of the world” (CCC 2097).

**Prayer:** Prayer is the act of lifting our mind and heart towards God in acts of adoration and love. There are several types of prayer: *adoration, thanksgiving, intercession and petition*. Prayer is indispensable to the carrying out of God’s commandments and the living of the moral life.

**Sacrifice:** Sacrifice is an outward expression of our adoration and gratitude. Every outward sacrifice ought to be the expression of a spiritual sacrifice. The only perfect sacrifice is the one offered by Jesus, but by uniting our sacrifices to His, our offerings can become meritorious in God’s eyes.

### “You shall have no other gods before Me”

*The first commandment forbids honoring other gods other than the one Lord who has revealed Himself to His people.*

-CCC 2110

Sins against the First Commandment include the following (with Catechism references):

**Superstition:** Attributing inherent powers to things that in themselves are only externals. It is a “perverse excess of religion.” It is normally a venial sin (2110-11).

**Idolatry:** Idolatry consists in attributing divine attributes to anything other than God. It has several forms: *polytheism* consists of venerating other gods. “Idolatry not only refers to false pagan worship...Man commits idolatry whenever he honors and reveres a creature in place of God (power, pleasure, money)” Idolatry is a perversion of man’s innate religious sense. Idolatry is a mortal sin if done intentionally, venial if unintentional (2113).

**Divination/Magic:** Recourse to Satan or demons, conjuring up the dead or other practices falsely supposed to “unveil” the future. Consulting horoscopes, astrology, palm reading, interpretation of omens and lots, the phenomena of clairvoyance, and recourse to mediums all conceal a desire for power over time, history, and, in the last analysis, other human beings, as well as a wish to conciliate hidden powers. They contradict the honor, respect, and loving fear that we owe to God alone. All practices of *magic* or *sorcery*, by which one attempts to tame occult powers, so as to place them at one's service and have a supernatural power over others - even if this were for the sake of restoring their health - are gravely contrary to the virtue of religion. These practices are even more to be condemned when accompanied by the intention of harming someone, or when they have recourse to the intervention of demons. Wearing charms is also reprehensible. *Spiritism* often implies divination or magical practices; the Church for her part warns the faithful against it. Recourse to so-called traditional cures does not justify either the invocation of evil powers or the exploitation of another's credulity (2116-17).

**Irreligion:** Irreligion consists primarily in a blatant disregard for sacred things or a treating of the sacred as something common. There are three main forms: Tempting God, sacrilege and simony. *Tempting God* consists of putting God’s power or goodness to the test in word or deeds and implies a doubt about God’s love, power and providence. *Sacrilege* occurs when we profane or treat unworthily the sacraments, liturgical actions, or anything dedicated to God. It is a mortal sin when committed against the Eucharist. *Simony* consists of the buying or selling of spiritual things. The Church recalls the words of St. Peter to Simon Magus: “Your money perish with you because you thought you could buy the gift of God!” (Acts 8:20) (CCC 2118-2122)

**Atheism:** Atheism consists of a denial or rejection of God’s existence and takes many social forms. *Agnosticism* professes and ignorance as to God’s existence but amounts to practical atheism. It can sometimes be a sincere search, but more often than not entails “indifferentism, a flight from the ultimate question of existence and a sluggish moral conscience” (2123-28).

### “You shall not make for yourself any graven image”

In the Old Testament, the making of any image of God was strictly prohibited and enforced with the strictest punishments. The reason for this prohibition was: (1) God had not revealed Himself in any form to the Israelites (Deut. 4:15-16), (2) Ancient man tended to attribute divine attributes to images of divinity and thus ended up committing idolatry, worshipping the creature rather than the Creator (Rom. 1:25) (3) God wanted His people to understand that He was purely spiritual, transcendent, and not of this world, unlike the gods of the nations

In the Old Testament, because of the primitive notion that men had about divinity, the making of graven images was strictly prohibited. “Nevertheless, already in the Old Testament, God ordained or permitted the making of images that pointed symbolically toward salvation by the incarnate Word” (CCC 2130). See also: Num 21:4-9, Wis. 16:5-14, Ex. 25:10-22, 1 Kings 6:23-28.

But with the inauguration of the New Testament, God indeed has revealed Himself in the form of an image: the Man Christ Jesus. Colossians 1:15 says of Jesus, “He is the *image* of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.” Thus, the reason for the old prohibition no longer exists; how can God prohibit images when He Himself became an image?

The Second Council of Nicaea (787) taught definitively on this matter, quoting St. Basil: “For the honor of the image passes to the original”; and he who shows reverence to the image, shows reverence to the substance of Him depicted in it.” Any honor paid to an image is actually paid to the one depicted in the image, and thus is not idolatry.

### **The Second Commandment**

*“You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.”*  
-Ex. 20:7

The second commandment proscribes respect for God’s name and, by extension, the names of all men who are made in God’s image. There is one word that is unique in revelation: the holy Name of God, so holy that the Jews of old did not even dare to speak it.

The faithful ought to bear witness to the holiness of the Lord’s name by confessing the faith without fear. All preaching/catechizing should be permeated with reverent use of the Lord’s name. The Scriptures say that the Name of Jesus has unique powers. “At the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth” (Phil. 2:10) “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

The second commandment forbids the abuse of God’s name, but also of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Virgin Mary and all the saints. It also forbids false oaths, which are promises made falsely in God’s name. Some sins against the second commandment:

**Blasphemy:** uttering reproach, defiance or ill words against God, and abusing His name. It extends to things spoken against the Church of Christ, the saints and sacred things in general. In itself it is a mortal sin.

**False oaths:** calling God’s holy name to witness a falsehood, or making magical use of the divine name. Both are serious sins.

**Perjury:** making a promise under oath with no intention of keeping it, or failing to keep a promise made under oath.

The holiness of God's name demands that we neither use it for trivial matters nor dishonor it once it is invoked. "An oath, that is the invocation of the divine name as a witness to truth, cannot be taken unless in truth, in judgment, and in justice" (CCC 2150).

When an oath is required by an illegitimate civil authority, it may be refused. It may also be refused when it is required for purposes contrary to the dignity of persons or to ecclesial communion (e.g., King Henry VIII's "Oath of Supremacy" of 1534, the refusal of which cost St. Thomas More his head).

### **The Third Commandment**

*"Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work."*

-Ex. 20:8-10

In the Old Testament, the Sabbath Day recalled Creation, but also the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. It served as a sign of God's irrevocable covenant. By the Sabbath, a portion of time was set aside and sanctified for the praise of God and the remembrance of His saving actions. As the Temple is to space, so the Sabbath was to time: a way of sanctifying Creation for the worship of God.

In the New Testament, the Sabbath is no longer the seventh day but the eighth day, the first day of the week upon which the Lord Jesus rose from the dead. The Apostles chose to honor God on this day as fitting for the New Covenant, and for the Church it replaces the Old Testament Sabbath. The Christian Sunday thus fulfills everything that the Jewish Saturday Sabbath represented, as St. Ignatius of Antioch (c.100) said, "Those who lived according to the old order of things have come to a new hope, no longer keeping the sabbath, but the Lord's Day, in which our life is blessed by Him and by his death."

Sunday worship observes the natural moral commandment inscribed in our heart by nature to render God outward, visible, public and regular worship.

### **A Day of Grace and Rest from Work**

When we worship and contemplate God, we transcend our merely physical existence and conform ourselves more to the image of God, Who is Spirit. Bodily, physical work, though necessary in this life, is something proper only to our earthly lives and will cease in heaven. Therefore, that we keep all things in their proper order, it has always been seen as fitting for Sunday to refrain from what the Church calls "servile labor." This is due to the fact that servile labor tends to focus us on matters of this world and distract us from worship and love of God. The Catechism says:

*On Sundays and other holy days of obligation, the faithful are to refrain from engaging in work or activities that hinder the worship owed to God, the joy proper to the Lord's Day, the performance of the works of mercy, and the appropriate relaxation of mind and body. Family needs or important social service can legitimately excuse from the obligation of Sunday rest. The*

*faithful should see to it that legitimate excuses do not lead to habits prejudicial to religion, family life, and health.*

-CCC 2185

However, charity binding together all things, the restriction on servile labor does *not* apply to good works and humble service to the sick, poor, elderly and infirm, nor does it apply to activities done in spending leisure time with one's family and relatives. Sunday is meant to be a time for reflection, silence, cultivation of the mind and meditation, which furthers the growth of the Christian interior life.

In a 2004 address to some Australian bishops, Pope John Paul II pointed out that the Catholic day of rest is fundamentally different from the secular concept of a "weekend," and that Catholics ought not to be carried away by entertainment and sporting events on Sundays. He said:

*"When Sunday loses its fundamental meaning and becomes subordinate to a secular concept of 'weekend' dominated by such things as entertainment and sport, people stay locked within a horizon so narrow that they can no longer see the heavens...Once upon a time, Sunday morning was respected as a time for church, but now it's almost completely dominated by sport of all kinds. Weekends are completely saturated by sporting activities. It leaves little room for God."*  
(3/28/04)

If you find yourself obliged to work on Sunday against your will, the day should nevertheless be lived as the day of our deliverance which lets us share in this peace and rest of God.

For Further Reading: Num 21:4-9, Wis. 16:5-14, Ex. 25:10-22, 1 Kings 6:23-28, Luke 10:27, Acts 8:9-24; St. Basil, *De Spiritu Sancto* 18:45 (c.360); St. John Damascene, *On Holy Images*, (c. 730). *Catechism of the Catholic Church* § 2084-2195; John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* (1998); Benedict XVI, *Deus est Caritas* (2005); Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi* (2007)