

THE FIRST AND SECOND COMMANDMENTS OF THE CHURCH

Which are the chief commandments of the Church?

A. The chief commandments of the Church are six:

- To hear Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation.
- To fast and abstain on the days appointed.
- To confess at least once a year.
- To receive the Holy Eucharist during the Easter time.
- To contribute to the support of our pastors.
- Not to marry persons who are not Catholics, or who are related to us within the third degree of kindred, nor privately without witnesses, nor to solemnize marriage at forbidden times.

Is it a mortal sin not to hear Mass on a Sunday or a holy day of obligation?

A. It is a mortal sin not to hear Mass on a Sunday or a holy day of obligation, unless we are excused for a serious reason. They also commit a mortal sin, who, having others under their charge, hinder them from hearing Mass, without a sufficient reason.

"**Serious reason**" -- that is, a very good reason, such as sickness, necessity of taking care of the sick, great danger of death, etc. Some persons when they go to the country in the summer believe themselves excused from hearing Mass because the church is a little further from them or the Mass at more inconvenient times than in the city. When they are in the country they are bound by the same obligations as the Catholics who live in that parish the whole year round, and they must go to Mass as these do, even if it is more inconvenient than in the city. Persons who have it in their power to select their own summer resort, should not, without great necessity, select a place where there is no Catholic church, and where they will be deprived of Mass and the Sacraments for several months, and where there is danger of their dying without the Sacraments. Some excuse themselves from going to Mass because they are too tired to rise in the morning. They should be ashamed to give such an excuse. Was our Blessed Lord not tired when He carried His Cross? He was tired, for He fell under it several times. And where was He going? To Calvary, to offer up the bloody sacrifice of the Cross for you. Will you plead fatigue as an excuse when you come to be judged by Him? Others again have a great habit of coming late for Mass. No matter at what hour the Mass may be, they will always be late; and I am afraid these persons will also be too late to enter Heaven. By coming late they show disrespect to Our Lord and distract others; and to avoid doing so, they should, when late, take a place in the rear of the church. When you are very late for one Mass, you should wait for the next--at least, for as much of the next as you did not hear in the first. You should not, however, begrudge a little extra time to God. To hear Mass properly, you should be in your place a few minutes before the priest comes out, and make up your mind what blessing you will ask, or for what intention you desire to hear the Mass.

"**Having others under their charge.**" Some parents are very careless about their children attending Mass, especially on holy days. Now, they must remember that in such neglect the sin will be theirs as well as the children's. Again, masters and mistresses do not at times give their workmen and servants sufficient opportunity to hear Mass, above all on holy days. All masters and mistresses must remember that they are bound not only to give their servants an opportunity to hear Mass, but they are bound as far as they conveniently can to see that they embrace the opportunity, just as they should see to their children in such matters. Catholics having in their employ others, such as engineers, drivers, conductors, etc., must make some arrangement between their men by which they will be able to attend Mass on Sundays and holy days. The same holds good for companies and corporations having under their charge a large force of men who are obliged by circumstances to work on Sundays.

Why were holy days instituted by the Church?

A. Holy days were instituted by the Church to recall to our minds the great mysteries of religion and the virtues and rewards of the saints.

For just the same reason that the government has legal holidays. What would the people of this country know or think at the present time about the Declaration of Independence, and all connected with it, if they did not celebrate from childhood every year, on the Fourth of July, the great day on which their forefathers claimed to be free and independent from the nation that was persecuting them? The Fourth of July keeps alive in our memory the struggles of our ancestors of one hundred years or more ago--their great battles, their sufferings and triumph, the blessings they secured for us, and for which we praise them. In like manner, the feast of the Resurrection of Our Lord keeps us in mind of the sad condition in which we were before Our Lord redeemed us, and how He liberated us from the slavery

of the devil and secured for us so many wonderful blessings. Again, what would we remember about George Washington if we did not celebrate his birthday? That holiday keeps before our minds the life and actions of that great man and all he did for our benefit. So, too, when we celebrate every year the feast of a saint in the Church, it keeps before our minds his works and all that he did for God and the Church, and makes us anxious to imitate his virtues. On every day in the year the Church honors some mystery of our holy faith or some saint by saying Mass all over the world in honor of the feast, and by obliging the priests and bishops to say the divine office for the same purpose. The feast--day of a saint is generally the day on which he died; because that is considered the day on which he entered into Heaven -- the day on which he was born into the new world.

The "**divine office**" is a collection of prayers, hymns, lessons, and psalms which every priest and bishop must read every day of his life. As it is said each day in honor of some particular mystery or saint, the greater part of it differs for each day. The prayers are to God, asking some grace or blessing in honor of the saint--generally such graces as were granted to the saint. The hymns are in the saint's honor; the lessons are parts of the Holy Scripture, or an account of the saint's life; and the psalms are those beautiful poems that King David composed and sang to God. The divine office is the prayer of the universal Church for its children, and if a priest neglects to say it he commits a mortal sin. It takes about an hour to say the whole divine office, but it is not intended to be said all at once. It is so divided that it is said at three times in the day. The part called "Matins" and "Lauds" is said very early in the morning and before Mass. The part called "Little Hours" is said later in the day; and the part called "Vespers" and "Compline" is said in the afternoon. See, therefore, how anxious the Church is for the good of its children, when it makes its bishops, priests, and religious pray daily for all the faithful, and send up in one voice the same prayer to the throne of God.

How should we keep the holy days of obligation?

A. We should keep the holy days of obligation as we should keep the Sunday.

What do you mean by fast--days?

A. By fast--days I mean days on which we are allowed but one full meal.

According to the traditional Catholic method of fasting, one may eat "**one full meal**" each day with meat included, plus two smaller meatless meals, both of which together do not equal the one full meal. No eating between meals is allowed, although drinking beverages such as coffee and tea are allowed and are not considered to break the fast. (Milk, juice, and soft drinks are also considered not to break the fast, although they are in fact foods and mitigate the effects of the fast and work contrary to its intent because they satisfy one's hunger to some extent, since they have food value.) They, therefore, who follow the above regulations obey the Catholic method of fasting. Today the prescribed days of fast for the whole Church are Ash Wednesday and Good Friday (these are also days of abstinence). However the Church today says that the *meaning* of the law of fasting during Lent remains, although the *extent* of the obligation has been changed. In other words, Lent remains as a season of penance in the Church, but how it is to be observed is greatly up to the individual, though no one may think himself excused from all penance whatsoever, and those who are in the fasting age group should still practice the Church's form of fasting, since fasting is a primary and very efficacious form of penance.

Those who, for sufficient reasons, are excused from the obligation of fasting, are not on that account freed from the law of abstinence, for all who have reached their fourteenth birthday are bound to abstain from flesh--meat on days when it is forbidden -- Ash Wednesday and the Fridays of Lent. The following persons are excused from fasting:

those who are not yet twenty--one or who have begun their sixtieth year (from their 59th birthday onward);

those whose infirmity, condition, or occupation renders it impossible or dangerous for them to fast.

If you think you should be excused from fasting or abstaining, state your reasons to your confessor and ask his advice. On a fast--day, therefore, you have to look both to the quantity and the kind of food, while on a day of abstinence--as the Fridays in Lent other than Good Friday--you have to look only to the kind.

What do you mean by days of abstinence?

A. By days of abstinence I mean days on which we are forbidden to eat flesh--meat, but are allowed the usual amount of food.

Why does the Church command us to fast and abstain?

A. The Church commands us to fast and abstain in order that we may mortify our passions and satisfy for our sins.

"Mortify our passions," keep our bodies under control, do bodily penance. Remember it is our bodies that generally lead us into sin; if therefore we punish the body by fasting and mortification, we atone for the sin, and thus God wipes out a part of the temporal punishment due to it.

Why does the Church command us to abstain from flesh-meat on Ash Wednesday and the Fridays of Lent and to abstain from flesh-meat or do some other chosen penance on the other Fridays of the year?

A. The Church commands us to abstain, from flesh-meat on Ash Wednesday and the Fridays of Lent and to abstain from flesh-meat or do some other chosen penance on the other Fridays of the year in honor of the day on which Our Savior died.

ON THE THIRD, FOURTH, FIFTH, AND SIXTH COMMANDMENTS OF THE CHURCH

What is meant by the command of confessing at least once a year?

A. By the command of confessing at least once a year is meant that we are obliged, under pain of mortal sin, to go to confession within the year.

"Within the year"--that is, the time between your confessions must never be longer than a year, or, at least not longer than the period between the beginning of one Eastertide and the end of the next. All persons who have attained the age of reason are bound to comply with this precept, and parents should remind their children of it.

Q. Should we confess only once a year?

A. We should confess frequently, if we wish to lead a good life.

Some seem to think that they need not go to confession if they have not committed sin since their last confession. Two graces are given in penance, as you already know: one, to take away the sins confessed, and the other, to strengthen us against temptation and enable us to keep our good resolutions. Now, as we are always tempted, we should go frequently to confession to get the grace to resist. The saints used to go to confession very frequently, sometimes every day. They used to go when tempted, to obtain the grace to resist and to expose their temptations to their confessor and ask his advice. Again the Holy Scripture tells us that the just man falls seven times; and "just man" in Holy Scripture means a very good man, that is, one doing for God, his neighbor, and himself what he ought to do. St. Joseph is called in the Scripture a "just man" and he was the foster--father of Our Lord. Now, if the good man falls seven times, he must arise after each fall; for if he did not get up after the first fall, he could not fall the second time. This teaches us that we all commit some kind of sin, at least, and have always something to confess if we only examine our conscience closely. It teaches us also that when we have the misfortune to fall into sin, we should rise as quickly as possible.

Q. Should children go to confession?

A. Children should go to confession when they are old enough to commit sin, which is commonly about the age of seven years.

"To commit sin" that is, when they know the difference between good and evil.

What sin does he commit who neglects to receive Communion during the Easter time?

A. He who neglects to receive Communion during the Easter time commits a mortal sin.

What is the Easter time?

A. The Easter time is, in this country, the time between the first Sunday of Lent and Trinity Sunday, inclusive.

Trinity Sunday is the eighth Sunday after Easter. Therefore the whole Easter--time is from the first Sunday of Lent--that is, seven weeks before Easter--to Trinity Sunday, eight weeks after it, or fifteen weeks in all; and anyone who does not go to Holy Communion sometime during these fifteen weeks commits mortal sin.

Are we obliged to contribute to the support of our pastors?

A. We are obliged to contribute to the support of our pastors, and to bear our share in the expenses of the Church and school.

And any charitable institution connected with the Church. The Holy Land was divided among the tribes of Israel, who were the descendants of the twelve sons of Jacob. Now, one of these twelve tribes was made up entirely of

priests and persons who served in the temple of God, called Levites. They received none of the land, but were to be supported by the other eleven tribes. All the people were obliged by the law to give what they called first-fruits, and tithes--that is, one tenth of their income in goods or money each year to the temple for its support and the support of those who served it. In the New Law no definite amount is assigned, but every Christian is left free to give what he can to God's Church according to his generosity. But if God left you free, should you therefore be stingy with Him? Moreover, all that we have comes from God, and should we return Him the least and the worst? For every alms you give for God's sake He can send you a hundred blessings; and what you refuse to give to His Church or poor He can take from you in a thousand ways, by sending misfortunes. We read in the Bible (*Gen. 4*) that Adam's sons, Cain and Abel, both offered sacrifice to God. Abel's sacrifice was pleasing, but Cain's was not. Why? Because, as we are told, Cain did not offer to God the best he had, but likely the worst; or at least, he offered his sacrifice with a bad disposition. Then when he saw that his brother's sacrifice was pleasing to God, being filled with jealousy, he killed him; and in punishment God marked him and condemned him to be a wanderer on the face of the earth. We are told he was always afraid of being killed by everyone he saw. See, then, what comes of being unwilling to be generous with God.. What we give Him He does not need, but by giving, we worship and thank Him. Do not people in the world often give presents to those who have done them a favor, that they may thus show their gratitude? Now, God is always doing us favors, and why should we not show our gratitude to Him by giving generously in His honor? When we give to the orphans, etc., we give to Him; for He says: "Whatsoever you give to these little ones you give to Me." Again, when Our Lord tells what will happen on the Day of Judgment (*Matt. 25:31*, etc.), He says, the Judge will divide all the people of the world into two bodies; the good He will place on His right hand and the wicked on His left. Then He will praise the good for what they did and welcome them to Heaven; but to the wicked He will say, "Depart from Me, because when I was hungry you gave Me not to eat; when I was thirsty you gave Me not to drink; you clothed Me not" etc. And then the wicked shall ask, when did we see You in want and not relieve You? He will tell them that He considered the poor just the same as Himself; and as they did nothing for His poor, they did nothing for Him.

What is the meaning of the commandment not to marry within the third degree of kindred?

A. The meaning of the commandment not to marry within the third degree of kindred is that no one is allowed to marry another within the third degree of blood relationship.

"**Third Degree,**" What relatives are in the third degree? Brother and sister are in the first degree; first cousins are in the second degree; second cousins are in the third degree. Therefore all who are second cousins or in nearer relationship cannot be married without a dispensation from the Church allowing them to do so. A *dispensation* granted by the Church is a permission to do something which its law forbids. Since it made the law, it can also dispense from the observance of it. The Church could not give permission to do anything that God's law forbids. It could not, for example, give permission to a brother and sister to marry, because it is not alone the law of the Church but God's law also that forbids that. But God's law does not forbid first or second cousins to get married; but the Church's law forbids it, and thus it can in special cases dispense from such laws. God's law is called also the natural law. You must be very careful not to confound the marriage laws that the Church makes with the marriage laws that the State makes. When the State makes laws contrary to the laws of God or of the Church, you cannot obey such laws without committing grievous sin. For instance, the State allows divorce; it allows persons to marry again if the husband or wife has been sentenced to imprisonment for life; it does not recognize all the impediments to marriage laid down by the Church. Such laws as these Catholics cannot comply with; but when the State makes laws which regard only the civil effects of marriage, such as refer to the property of the husband or wife, the inheritance of the children, etc., laws, in a word, which are not opposed either to the laws of God or of His Church, then you may and must obey them; for the authorities of the government are our lawful superiors, and must be obeyed in all that is not sin. What we have said with regard to the marriage laws is true for all the rest. Thus the civil court might, on account of some technicality, free you legally from the payment of a debt; but that would not free you in conscience from paying what you justly owe. Again, the court might legally decide in your favor in an unjust suit; but that would not give you the right in conscience to keep what you have thus fraudulently or unjustly obtained.

What is the meaning of the command not to marry privately?

A. The command not to marry privately means that none should marry without the blessing of God's priests or without witnesses.

If persons wishing to be married suspect that there is any impediment existing between them, they should express their doubts and the reasons for them to the priest.

Here it is well for you to know that if any Catholic goes to be married before a Protestant minister, he is, by the laws of the Church in the United States, excommunicated. I You must know excommunication means cut off from the communion of the Church and the body of the faithful; cut off from the Sacraments and from a share in all the holy Masses and public prayers offered by the Church throughout the world. It is a punishment the Church inflicts upon

its disobedient children who will not repent but persist in wrongdoing. If they die willfully excommunicated, they die in mortal sin, and no Mass or funeral prayers can be publicly offered for them; nor can they be buried in consecrated ground. Besides the excommunicated, there are others who cannot be buried in consecrated ground: namely, infants or others who have not been baptized; those who deliberately committed suicide; those who have publicly lived sinful lives and evidently died in that public sin; and all persons who are not Catholics. If a Catholic who is not publicly a sinner dies suddenly, we cannot judge that he is in mortal sin; and hence such a one may be buried in consecrated ground.

It is the desire of the Church that all its faithful children should be buried in the ground which it has blessed for their remains; and wherever it is possible Catholics must have their own burying ground.

What is the meaning of the precept not to solemnize marriage at forbidden times?

A. The meaning of the precept not to solemnize marriage at forbidden times is that during Lent and Advent the marriage ceremony should not be performed with pomp or a nuptial Mass.

Persons may be married at these times quietly, wherever it is not positively forbidden by the laws of the diocese.

What is the nuptial Mass?

A. The nuptial Mass is a Mass appointed by the Church to invoke a special blessing upon the married couple.

It is a Mass especially for them and cannot be said for anyone else. At the most solemn parts of the Mass the priest turns to them and prays that God may bless their union.

Should Catholics be married at a nuptial Mass?

A. Catholics should be married at a nuptial Mass, because they thereby show greater reverence for the holy Sacrament and bring richer blessings upon their wedded life.

The Church wishes to give to the marriage of its children observing its laws all the solemnity possible, and to impress its dignity and sanctity so deeply upon their minds that they may never forget the solemn promise made at the altar of God. The thought of that day will keep them from sin. On the other hand, the Church shows its great displeasure when Catholics do not keep its laws, but marry persons not of their own religion. At a mixed marriage the couple cannot be married in the church, nor even in the sacristy; the priest cannot wear a surplice or stole or any of the sacred vestments of the Church; he cannot use holy water, or the Sign of the Cross; he cannot bless the ring or even use the Church's language--Latin. Everything is done in the coldest manner, to remind Catholics that they are doing what is displeasing to their mother the Church.

Again the Church wishes its children to prepare for the Sacrament of Matrimony just as they would prepare for any other Sacrament--Penance, Holy Eucharist, Holy Orders, etc.

Imagine a boy going up for First Communion laughing, talking, or gazing about him, without any thought of the great Sacrament he is about to receive; thinking only of how he appears in his new clothing, of those who are present, etc., and spending all his time of preparation not in purifying his soul, but in adorning his body! Think of him returning from Holy Communion and immediately forgetting Our Lord! Now, Matrimony is deserving of all the respect due to a Sacrament, and hence the Church wishes all its children to be married at Mass; or at least in the morning. It does not like them to marry in the evening, and go to the reception of the Sacrament as they would to a place of vain amusement. For on such occasions they cannot show the proper respect in the church, and possibly turn the ceremony into an occasion of sin for all who attend; for they often seem to forget the holiness of the place and the respect due to the presence of Our Lord upon the altar. Indeed it should be remembered, at whatever time the marriage takes place, that conduct, dress, and all else must be in keeping with the dignity of the place and the holiness of the Sacrament, and the women should not come into the Church with uncovered heads.