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Discussion
Club
Series

Commandments of the Church

edited by

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THE QUEEN'S WORK

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THE QUEEN'S WORK

COMMANDMENTS OF THE CHURCH

NOTE: *The commandment dealing with marriage regulations is treated elsewhere.*

N. B. This outline does not pretend to be exhaustive of the subject; it is an outline of detailed suggestions. It will hardly be possible to study this matter satisfactorily without the help and cooperation of a priest moderator. Those groups that find it impossible to obtain the help of a priest moderator should study this subject with the view to gaining definite knowledge on the positive aspects of the precepts. The more difficult questions and problems that may arise in the course of this study should be put aside until such time as a priest moderator will be present.

GENERAL COMMANDMENTS OF THE CHURCH

The laws of the Church are part of what is known as canon law. The last revision of the code of canon law took effect on Pentecost Sunday, 1918. The code now contains 2,414 laws. Of these, very few have much direct bearing on the rights and duties of the Catholic laity. Chief among the laws that bind the faithful are, in general, the six known as the precepts of the Church.

Perhaps your group can obtain the help of someone qualified to explain more fully the code of canon law and to translate for you the actual statement of the precepts of the Church from canon law.

In many cases the subject matter of the precepts of the Church is the same as the subject matter of the Ten Commandments of God; thus many of the laws of the Church are both divine law and Church law. Have someone point out to your group those precepts of the Church that contain subject matter similar to the subject matter contained in the commandments and explain why the Church makes an additional law on the same subject matter.

A brief talk could be given on the Church's right to make laws or on the governing power of the Church and the source from which this power is derived. (One reference on this subject is the article in the Catholic Encyclopedia under the title "The Church," by Joyce.)

THE FIRST PRECEPT OF THE CHURCH

I. TO HEAR MASS ON SUNDAYS AND HOLY DAYS OF OBLIGATION

A. Show that this precept, as to its general purpose and substance, is of natural and divine law; as to its detail, of Church law.

B. Give something of the history of the observance of the Sabbath according to the Old Law.

C. Show how the custom of observing Sunday as the Lord's Day was practiced even during the lifetime of the Apostles.

(Cf. *Acts xx, 7; I Cor. xvi, 2*. Read Kellner's *Heortology of the Christian Festivals*, page 6.)

As early as the third and fourth centuries laws were made confirming the early custom of assisting at Mass and ceasing from labor on Sundays and holy days.

D. The affirmative or preceptive part of this first precept commands the hearing of Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation.

Discuss the six feast days that are holy days of obligation for the United States. Note that three are feasts of Our Lord, two of Our Lady, and one of all saints. Discuss the feast days that are holy days of obligation for other countries.

1. That which is commanded is the hearing of Mass. Attendance at other services cannot be offered as substitutes, *e. g.*, benediction, nor does this precept oblige Catholics to attend other services. To fulfill the precept of hearing Mass, a *whole* Mass must be heard. (Have someone explain to your group the essential and the integral parts of the Mass and what precisely constitutes coming late for Mass.)

2. How Mass must be heard. Explain what constitutes external assistance at Mass; in internal or mental assistance, what intention and what attention are required?

3. Where Mass must be heard. Can the obligation to hear Mass be fulfilled by attending Mass in any Catholic rite? (*E. g.*, Latin rite, Greek rite.) In any place? (In open air, in a semipublic oratory, in a convent chapel.)

E. The best thing that could come out of a study of this precept would be the positive presentation of the Mass as so important and salutary that Catholics who realized what the

Mass is would not need to be reminded of this first precept of the Church in order to attend Mass. In the matter outlined under I, there is opportunity for innumerable talks and discussions: on the best way of assisting at Mass, on the Mass as our sacrifice, on the missal and the use of the missal. Among other pamphlets that will be found valuable in the study of this subject there is "How to Pray the Mass," published by THE QUEEN'S WORK.

Discussions:

1. Would it not be better that the Church, rather than compel attendance at Mass, merely recommend and urge attendance at Mass but not command it under pain of sin, or at least not under pain of mortal sin?

2. What remedies can be suggested for personal distraction at Mass?

3. What answers can be offered to this excuse for a man's living in sin: "A man who by going to church is not living up to his conscience is a hypocrite; I may be in the category of sinners, but I am no hypocrite"?

4. If you are traveling or visiting in a foreign country on a day that is a holy day in that country but not in your own country, are you obliged to attend Mass on that day?

Bibliography:

Religious Outline for Colleges, Cooper. Course Three.

Moral Theology, John A. McHugh, O. P., and Charles J. Callan, O. P. Vol. 2.

Catholic Encyclopedia Supplement, article under the title "Law."

THE SECOND PRECEPT OF THE CHURCH

II. TO FAST AND ABSTAIN ON THE PRESCRIBED DAYS

As an introduction to this subject have someone prepare a brief paper on the history of abstinence and fasting. Cf. Catholic Encyclopedia, article entitled "Abstinence." For another interesting phase of this subject cf. Catholic Encyclopedia, article entitled "Physical Effects of Abstinence." Possibly a

medical doctor, a member of the group or a friend of one of the members, could explain this aspect.

A. Abstinence.

1. The law of abstinence applies only to the kind of food permitted (Canon 1250). More specifically it means abstinence from meat. By meat is meant the flesh of warm-blooded animals. The law also forbids the eating of soup, gravy, or sauces made from meat. Aquatic or semiaquatic animals such as frogs do not come within this law.

2. On days of *complete abstinence* meat (and soup, gravy or sauces made from meat) may not be eaten at all. On days of *partial abstinence* they may be eaten once, at the principal meal.

3. To whom this law applies: All Catholics who are seven years of age or older. (Note that the term "seven years" is used, not the term "age of reason.")

4. Days of *complete abstinence* are all the Fridays of the year, Ash Wednesday, the Vigil of the Immaculate Conception, and December 23. Days of *partial abstinence* are Ember Wednesdays and Saturdays (the Wednesdays and Saturdays following [a] the first Sunday of Lent, [b] Pentecost Sunday, [c] September 14, [d] the third Sunday of Advent) and the Vigil of Pentecost. (Note that when a holyday of obligation falls on Friday or when a vigil falls on Sunday, the law of abstinence does not hold.)

B. Fasting.

1. The law of fasting applies to the quantity of food taken. On days of fasting the number of meals and quantity of food at each meal are limited.

a. Only one full meal a day is allowed. Meat may be taken at this principal meal if the day is not a day of complete abstinence.

b. Two other meatless meals, sufficient to maintain strength, may be taken according to each one's needs; but, together, they should not equal a full meal.

c. Eating between meals is **not** permitted; but liquids, including milk and fruit juices, are **allowed**.

Discuss the order of meals, particularly whether the full meal may be taken in the evening or in the afternoon, according to the custom or convenience of the individual or the family.

2. To whom the law of fasting applies: To Catholics over twenty-one years of age and under fifty-nine years of age.

3. Days of fasting are the weekdays of Lent; Ember Days (Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays following [a] the first Sunday of Lent, [b] Pentecost Sunday, [c] September 14, [d] the third Sunday of Advent); the Vigils of Pentecost and of the Immaculate Conception; and December 23. (Note that when a vigil falls on a Sunday, the law of fasting does not hold.)

(These regulations concerning fast and abstinence have been promulgated in most archdioceses and dioceses of the United States. In places where these regulations might not obtain, consult the local statutes. The bishop's Lenten pastoral usually indicates the fast and abstinence regulations for the local diocese.)

C. Exemptions and Dispensations.

See to it that the members clearly understand the difference between exemption and dispensation. Then find out who are or can be:

1. Exempt from abstinence.
2. Exempt from fasting.
3. Dispensed from abstinence.
4. Dispensed from fasting.

(Note that the bishop's Lenten pastoral usually indicates who are exempt and under what conditions dispensations are granted.)

Discussions:

1. Show that abstinence and fasting, besides being laws of the Church, also come under natural and divine law.
2. Can the observance of the laws of fasting and abstinence be carried to excess?
3. Is dieting, as practiced today, ever sinful?

THE THIRD PRECEPT OF THE CHURCH

III. TO CONFESS OUR SINS AT LEAST ONCE A YEAR

PART ONE

Our Lord instituted the sacrament of penance. He gave His priests the power to forgive sins. (*Jno. xx, 21.*) Christ commands us to confess our sins. If we do not confess our sins, the priest cannot forgive us.

By this third commandment the Church again urges upon us Christ's command to confess. The Church also binds us to a definite time. The Church is so insistent that those in mortal sin confess once a year that she sets a definite time and makes confession obligatory at this time under pain of mortal sin. The reason is that we will be forced under pain of mortal sin to get the sins off our soul and receive the spiritual benefits of confession.

The precept to confess our sins once a year (Canon Law 906) reads: "All Catholics of either sex who have attained the use of reason [who can tell the difference between right and wrong] are bound, under pain of mortal sin, to go to confession once a year—provided he or she has committed a mortal sin or sins since the last confession the year before and is aware of the fact."

A. Who is bound to go to confession? Every baptized Catholic who has attained the use of reason and is guilty of a mortal sin. Note that the precept specifies "the use of reason." That age may be earlier than the age of seven. To know whether or not a child has attained the years of "discretion," one must be in daily contact with that child. We can tell whether or not the youngster knows the difference between right and wrong by observing whether he knows that it is wrong to disobey, to lie, to be impudent, to quarrel, and the like. True, a small child generally does not ever commit a mortal sin, but it is good for a child to begin to go to confession early in his life so that he may reap the benefits of the sacrament. However, the pastor or the sisters should be consulted as to whether the child is old enough to receive the sacrament of penance.

B. When is a Catholic bound to go to confession? We are obliged to confess our mortal sins once a year. The obligation

may be fulfilled at any time, on any day of the year. As a matter of convenience most of the faithful confess before Easter Day, in preparation for the Easter communion. But confession at such a time is not obligatory.

C. To whom must we confess our sins? We may confess to any duly authorized Catholic priest, either of our own rite, the Latin rite, or to a Catholic priest of the Greek rite. Formerly there was not this freedom with regard to choice of confessors. Now we have perfect freedom in the choice of confessors. We need not necessarily confess, for example, to one of the priests in our parish.

D. Where are we bound to confess? We are permitted to confess in any place where we can get a priest to hear us. This, too, is a new freedom. Before 1918 Catholics had to go to their parish church to confess their sins.

E. Must the Catholic who during the year has committed no mortal sins but only venial sins also confess once a year? No. Only those who in the course of the year have sinned mortally are bound under pain of mortal sin to confess within that year. Hence those who have only venial sins on their souls need not confess within the year.

1. If a Catholic makes his or her yearly confession a bad or a sacrilegious one, he is bound under pain of mortal sin to confess again.

2. If a Catholic cannot get to confession within the year (*i. e.* a nurse in wartime; a scientist on a long jungle expedition) and has mortal sins on his soul, he must go as soon as is possibly convenient.

All the above deals with sheer obligation.

Bibliography:

NOTE: It is difficult to obtain much reading material on the obligation of confession; books treat it rather sparsely. However, brief accounts may be found in:

A Handbook of Moral Theology, Koch and Preuss, Volume 4: Annual Confession.

Moral Theology, Fr. McHugh, O. P., and Fr. Callan, O. P., Volume 2, No. 2590.

Legislation on the Sacraments in the New Code of Canon Law, Fr. Aryinhac, Penance, pages 259-267.

Canon Law Code, Canons 901 to 907, inclusive.

For history of the developments of the methods of confession, consult: Catholic Encyclopedia, article entitled "Penance"; The Catholic Church and Confession, Geddes and Thurston. Chapter 3.

PART II.

It is the mind of the Church and the wish of God that we receive the Sacrament of Penance often. We are counseled to confess often. A Catholic who genuinely wants to love Our Lord will go to confession frequently. A serious Catholic will go at least every two weeks.

A. Why confess often? Because of supernatural and natural and common-sense reasons.

1. Supernatural Reasons:

a. Penance is a sacrament, confers grace, increases grace, and helps us to overcome temptations and sinful habits.

b. We are absolved from our sins and are ready for death.

c. The Holy Ghost speaks to us and directs us through our confessor.

d. All of us commit venial sins. Through confession we are forgiven these sins and aided in lessening their number and the number of times we commit each one.

e. Confession teaches us the horror of sin and the mercy of God and gives us motives to be good.

f. The Catholic who confesses every two weeks fulfills the conditions, as far as confession goes, for gaining indulgences.

2. Natural and Common-Sense Reasons:

a. Confessing is psychologically good. If we know we have to confess our sins, we will tend to be more careful about avoiding sinning.

b. Confession gives us a chance to unload our anxieties, problems, and the worries of our errors and sins.

c. Confession gives us peace of mind.

d. In a confessor we have a friend, an expert adviser.

e. The confessor is to the welfare of our soul and

spiritual life what a doctor is to the welfare of our bodies and our physical life.

f. Through confession we learn to meet difficulties and temptations; we receive aid, advice, and solutions for our problems; we learn ways and means of preparing for the future; we get correct ideas of marriage and courtship; we receive advice on the choice of a state of life; we learn how to advance in virtue; we receive aid for our business, home, and social problems.

(Even Protestants realize the power and the good that lie in confession.)

Remember you are never obliged to confess venial sins; only mortal sins. Still, a Catholic who is trying to love and serve Christ better goes to confession often, even if he or she has few if any sins to confess. If you have no sins to confess, mention sins already forgiven in past confessions. The central and fundamental idea is to receive the sacrament and get help and grace from its reception.

Discussions:

1. From the viewpoint of confession, what advantages has a Catholic over a Protestant?

2. Answer the man who says: "When I went to school, in 1900, we had to make our yearly confession to our own pastor and in our parish church."

3. Answer the girl who says: "It's a free country. I am twenty-one years old. I know my way about. Why ask a lot of advice of a pokey old priest? He doesn't understand the modern generation."

Bibliography:

The Sacrament of Penance, Pohle-Preuss.

Religion and Leadership, Lord, S.J., Chapter 24.

(Also those references listed under Part I.)

Confession Is a Joy? (pamphlet), Lord, S.J.

THE FOURTH PRECEPT OF THE CHURCH

IV. TO RECEIVE HOLY COMMUNION AT EASTER TIME

Our Lord said, "Except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you shall not have life in you." He meant

by this that our spiritual life of grace will die if we do not nourish it with divine food.

The Church, by her law, demands that we receive the benefits of contact with Christ.

Canon 859 reads, "Each and every Catholic of either sex must, after having attained the years of discretion, receive Holy Communion once a year, at least in the Easter Time."

Meaning: All Catholics, once they have attained the use of reason, are bound, under pain of mortal sin, to go to Holy Communion once a year, and that at Easter Time.

A. When? The faithful may make their Easter duty on any day from the first Sunday in Lent to Trinity Sunday, inclusive. This is the meaning of "the Easter Time" in the United States. The Catholic is not permitted to anticipate the Easter communion. If he cannot possibly receive communion within the Easter Time, he is still obliged to go to Holy Communion before the following Lent. (The period of time could, for good reasons in individual cases, be extended. Consult your pastor or confessor.)

B. Where? The Catholic may make his Easter duty in any church. We are counseled to receive Holy Communion in our own church or at least to tell our pastor that we have made our Easter duty in another church. He is responsible for us. (For interesting data on the history of the above points, cf. "History of the Commandments of the Church," Villien.)

C. How? By receiving Holy Communion worthily. A sacrilegious communion does not fulfill the obligation of making the Easter duty.

D. The Easter Duty.

1. Reasons for the law: The Church binds us, under pain of sin, to come into contact with Christ, who is holiness, love, power, goodness itself; to receive the Sacred Heart, in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Holy Communion teaches us to live according to God" and to look at life and all its events from God's viewpoint. Holy Communion increases grace in our soul and enlists Christ's omnipotence in our struggle with the world, the flesh, and the devil.

(Read: "The Wonderful Sacraments," by Doyle, the chapter on the Eucharist; "My Changeless Friend," by LeBuffe.)

2. Children and the Law: Canon 860 clearly states that a child who has attained the use of reason must make his or her yearly communion. The obligation, under pain of sin, rests on the parents or guardians. They must see that their little ones (when they know the difference between divine bread and ordinary bread and can adore it) are prepared to receive communion within the year. Let parents, confessor, and pastor judge the readiness of children for the reception of the sacrament.

E. The New Eucharistic Fast.

Pius XII, in January 1953, made a momentous contribution to the growth of frequent Communion by his decree on the Eucharistic Fast. But he really finished out his marvelous work by his *Motu Proprio* of March 19, 1957.

In this definitive expression of the law for the Eucharistic Fast, he first indicates a more liberal use the bishops may grant for Mass to be celebrated after midday.

Then he continues as follows:

2. "Priests and faithful, before Holy Mass or Holy Communion respectively, must abstain for three hours from solid foods and alcoholic beverages. Water does not break the fast."

3. "From now on the fast must be observed for the period of time indicated in Number Two, even for those who celebrate or receive Holy Communion at midnight or in the first hours of the day."

4. "The infirm, even if not bedridden, may take non-alcoholic beverages and that which is really and properly medicine, either in liquid or in solid form, before Mass or Holy Communion without any time limit.

"We strongly exhort priests and faithful who are able to do so to observe the old and venerable form of the Eucharistic Fast before Mass and Holy Communion. All those who will make use of these concessions must compensate for the good received by becoming shining examples of a Christian life and principally with works of penance and charity."

(From the *Motu Proprio* and in accord with the faithful translation, St. Louis, Mo., 1957.)

Bibliography:

Catholic Encyclopedia, article entitled "Canon Law Code." Canons 853-866. Cf. *Motu Proprio*, March 19, 1957.

THE FIFTH PRECEPT OF THE CHURCH

V. WE MUST CONTRIBUTE TO THE SUPPORT OF OUR PASTORS

A. The Church and her ministers are dealing in the things of heaven; but they are in the world and must meet material needs; hence, they need material help.

1. The Scriptures tell us that "the laborer is worthy of his hire." Also, "The Lord ordained that they who preach the gospel should live by the gospel."

2. The Church says: "We must relieve the necessities of the Church and her clergy."

B. Explanation: "In this precept the Church urges on the faithful the divine command to relieve the temporal necessities of the Church and clergy according to local regulations and accepted custom." (The Catholic Catechism, Gasparri.)

C. Why enjoined: "It is just that the faithful provide for the sacred ministers who work for their salvation so they be able to meet the expenses of divine worship and support themselves decently." (The Catholic Catechism, Gasparri.)

D. Common sense dictates that as we realize the necessity of and hence give our financial support to the federal, state, and city government by taxes so that public needs, facilities and defense may be supplied, in the same way must we act in regard to the Church and her officials and ministers.

Let us not forget that canon law absolutely forbids (save in exceptional cases) Catholic bishops and priests and men and women religious to indulge in secular business. Therefore, whether we realize it or not, they are at the mercy of the good will of the individual faithful Catholic; the only source

of their revenue is the offering of the faithful. This is something to be considered seriously by the faithful. These men and women who labor for Christ look on Christ's other faithful for the means, whereby they can continue their labors.

E. We must contribute to the Church and her clergy.

1. Our Parish.

A church worthy of God must be built or, if already built, must be kept in good condition. A school and a school hall must be erected. A rectory, a sisters' house, recreational facilities for sports, plays, and the like, must be provided and paid for.

Our parish priests must be generously supported. They have to pay bills: coal, light, water, janitor, expenses incurred by the running of your church, rectory, school, and so forth.

The parish priest must eat, dress well as befits God's representatives and our leaders, have a car for sick calls, provide the needs of the sisters; for we claim their time, service, advice, help.

Therefore we must support our parish priest and religious by every means our pocketbook affords: collection box, Sunday envelopes, pew rent, tickets for social and other affairs; remember them in our wills.

2. Our Diocese.

Our bishop must be generously supported. Diocesan expenses are heavy. Seminaries, high schools, law courts and offices must be maintained. Bills and taxes must be met and supplies paid for. He must contribute to civic, public drives and projects; he must help poor and needy priests and parishes, and so forth.

We must, therefore, willingly accede to the demands and assessments he makes upon us.

3. The Missions.

The home missions for whites, Negroes, Indians, and so forth. Foreign missions. Your contribution will enable missionaries to bring the faith to pagans and lighten the terrific burden of brave and lonely missionaries.

4. Religious orders.

Sisters, brothers, priests of religious orders—these run universities, colleges, high schools, hospitals, orphanages, asylums for the aged and poor and the insane. The members of con-

templative orders, who due to their lives of prayer and penance are one of the greatest powers in the world, need money to live. Give generously, for your money will help to spread Christ's kingdom among all men.

E. Be logical and understanding. Remember that the financial support you render is not a matter of paying cash for spiritual things (paying, for example, for Mass or the performance of a marriage ceremony). By no means. You can't buy spiritual benefits with material coin. Such buying would be simony. In this precept the Church simply commands us to contribute freely to the temporal needs of the Church and her clergy.

We spend a good deal on cigarettes, drinks and beverages, movies, the theater and other amusements, cars, and the like. Well and good; but don't let's stint when we give to God's cause.

There are many who can afford to give a day's wages to the church. Certainly no one could better dispose of money than to leave it, in a will, to the church.

The faithful at times object to sermons and talks that stress money. You can stop these talks—by freely offering to contribute all in your power toward the church that serves you and your needs.

Support the church, not only with your time, your life, your example, your pen and your tongue, but with your personal fortune.

Discussions:

1. New plans for raising money for the church.
2. Means to perfect the use of plans already in execution.

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(Consult a list of THE QUEEN'S WORK publications for further references.)
Support Your Church (pamphlet), Sunday Visitor Press.
History of the Commandments, Villien.