

CATECHESSES  
ON THE  
TEN COMMANDMENTS

(13 June – 28 November 2018)

POPE FRANCIS

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— CHAPTER I —

**The Fulfillment of the Law**

*St Peter's Square  
Wednesday, 13 June 2018*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!*

Today is the Feast of Saint Anthony of Padua. Who among you is named Anthony? A round of applause for all the ‘Anthonys’.

Today, we shall begin a new series of catecheses on the theme of the Commandments. The Commandments of the Law of God. To introduce it, let us draw from the passage just heard: the encounter between Jesus and a man — he is a young man — who, on his knees, asks Jesus how he can inherit eternal life (cf. Mk 10:17-21). And in that question is the challenge of every life, ours too: the desire for a full, infinite life. What must we do to achieve it? What path must we take? To truly live, to live a noble life.... How many young people try to ‘live’ and destroy themselves by following things that are fleeting.

Some think that it would be better to extinguish this impulse — the impulse to live — because it is dangerous. I would like to say, especially to young people: our worst enemy is not practical problems, no matter how serious and dramatic: life’s greatest danger is a poor spirit of adaptation which is neither meekness nor humility, but

*mediocrity, cowardice*.<sup>1</sup> Is a mediocre young person a youth with a future or not? No! He or she remains there, will not grow, will not have success. Mediocrity or cowardice. Those young people who are afraid of everything: ‘No, this is how I am...’. These young people will not move forward. Meekness, strength, and not cowardice, not mediocrity.

Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati — he was a young man — used to say that one must live, not just get by.<sup>2</sup> The mediocre just get by, living by their life force. One must ask the heavenly Father, for today’s young people, for the gift of a healthy *restlessness*. But, at home, in your homes, in every family, when a young person is seen sitting idle all day, at times mom and dad wonder: “is he sick; is something wrong?”, and they take him to the doctor. The life of young people is about moving forward, being restless, healthy restlessness, the capacity not to be content with a life without beauty, without colour. If young people are not hungry for an authentic life, I wonder, where will humanity end up? Where will humanity go with young people who are idle and not restless?

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<sup>1</sup> The Fathers speak of *cowardice (oligopsychia)*. Saint John Damascene defines it as “the fear of completing an action” (*Exact exposition of the Orthodox faith*, ii, 15) and Saint John Climacus adds that “cowardice is a childish disposition, in an old, vainglorious soul” (*Ladder of Divine Ascent*, xxi, 2).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Letter to Isidoro Bonini*, 27 February 1925.

The question of that man in the Gospel passage that we have heard is inside of each of us: how can we find life, life in abundance, happiness? Jesus answers: “*You know the commandments*” (v. 19), and cites part of the Ten Commandments. It is a pedagogical process, by which Jesus wishes to lead to an exact place; in fact it is already clear, from that man’s question, that he does not have a full life; he seeks more and is restless. Thus, what does he need in order to understand? He says: “Teacher, all these I have observed from my youth” (v. 20).

How do we pass from *youth to maturity*? When we begin to *accept our own limitations*. We become adults when we ‘relativize’ and become aware of ‘what is lacking’ (cf. v. 21). This man is forced to acknowledge that everything he is able to “do” does not rise above a “ceiling”; it does not exceed a margin.

How great it is to be men and women! How precious our existence is! Yet, there is a truth that, in the history of the last centuries, mankind has often rejected, with tragic consequences: the truth of our limitations.

In the Gospel Jesus says something that can help us: “Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to *fulfil them*” (Mt 5:17). The Lord Jesus gives us the fulfilment; he came for this. That man had to come to the brink, where he had to take a decisive leap, where the possibility was presented to stop living for himself, for his own

deeds, for his own goods and — precisely because he lacked a full life — to leave everything to follow the Lord.<sup>3</sup> Clearly, in Jesus' final — immense, wonderful — invitation, there is no proposal of poverty, but of wealth, of the true richness: “*You lack one thing; go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me*” (Mk 10:21).

Being able to choose between an original and a copy, who would choose the copy? Here is the challenge: finding life's original, not the copy. Jesus does not offer surrogates, but *true* life, *true* love, *true* richness! How will young people be able to follow us in faith if they do not see us choose the original, if they see us adjusting to half measures? It is awful to find half-measure Christians, — allow me the word — ‘dwarf’ Christians; they grow to a certain height and no more; Christians with a miniaturized, closed heart. It is awful to find this. We need the example of someone who invites me to a ‘*beyond*’, a ‘*plus*’, to grow a little. Saint Ignatius called it the ‘*magis*’, “the fire, the fervour of action that rouses us from slumber”.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> “The eye was created for light, the ear for sounds, each thing for its particular purpose, and the desire of the soul for soaring toward Christ” (Nicholas Cabasilas, *The Life in Christ*, ii, 90).

<sup>4</sup> *Address to the 36th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus*, 24 October 2016: “It is a *magis*, that *plus* that leads Ignatius to undertake initiatives,

The path of what is lacking passes through what there is. Jesus did not come to abolish the Law nor the Prophets, but to fulfil. We must start from reality in order to take the leap into '*what we lack*'. We must scrutinize the ordinary in order to open ourselves to the extraordinary.

In these catecheses we will take the two tablets of Moses as Christians, taking Jesus' hand, in order to pass from the illusions of youth to the treasure that is in heaven, walking behind Him. We will discover, in each of these laws, ancient and wise, the door opened by the Father who is in heaven so that the Lord Jesus, who has crossed the threshold, may lead us to true life. His life. The life of the children of God.

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to follow them through, and to evaluate their real impact on peoples' lives in matters of faith, justice, mercy, and charity".

## — CHAPTER II —

### The Ten Words

*St Peter's Square  
Wednesday, 20 June 2018*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!*

This Audience is taking place in two places: we, here in the Square, and in the Paul VI Hall where there are over 200 sick people who are following the Audience on the jumbo screen. All together we form one community. With a round of applause let us greet those who are in the Hall.

Last Wednesday we began a new series of catecheses on the Commandments. We saw that the Lord Jesus did not come to abolish the Law but to fulfil it. But we need to understand this perspective better.

In the Bible the Commandments do not exist for themselves, but are *part of a rapport, a relationship*. The Lord Jesus did not come to abolish the Law but to fulfil it. And there is that relationship, the *Covenant<sup>5</sup> between God and his People*. At

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<sup>5</sup> Chapter 20 of the Book of Exodus is preceded by the offer of the Covenant in chapter 19, in which the pronouncement is central: “Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex 19:5-6). This terminology is emblematically summarized in Lev 26:12: “I

the beginning of chapter 20 of the Book of Exodus we read — and this is important—: “*God spoke all these words*” (v. 1).

It seems to be an introduction like any other, but nothing in the Bible is banal. The text does not say: ‘*God spoke these commandments*’, but “*these words*”. Jewish tradition will always call the Decalogue ‘the Ten Words’. And this is exactly what the term ‘decalogue’ means.<sup>6</sup> Yet they have the form of laws; they are objectively commandments. Why, then, does the sacred Author use, precisely here, the term ‘ten words’? Why? Why does he not say ‘ten commandments’?

Is there a difference between a *command* and a *word*? A command is a communication that does not require dialogue. A word, instead, is the essential medium of *relationship as a dialogue*. God the Father creates by means of his Word, and his Son is the Word made flesh. Love is nourished by words, and likewise education or

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will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people”, and continues up to the announcement of the name of the Messiah, foretold in Isaiah 7:14, that is, *Emmanuel*, which appears in Matthew: “Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel (which means, God with us)” (Mt 1:23). All this indicates the essentially relational nature of the Jewish faith and, to the greatest degree, the Christian faith.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. also Ex 24:28b: “he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments”.

cooperation. Two people who do not love each other are unable to communicate. When someone speaks to our heart, our loneliness is over. It receives a word; there is communication, and the commandments are God's words: God communicates through these ten Words, and he awaits our response.

It is one thing to receive an order, and quite another to perceive that someone is trying to speak with us. A dialogue is much more than the communication of a truth. I may say to you: 'Today is the last day of Spring, warm Spring, but today is the last day'. This is a truth; it is not a dialogue. But if I ask you: 'What do you think about this Spring?', a dialogue begins. The Commandments are a dialogue. Communication "arises from the enjoyment of speaking and it enriches those who express their love for one another through the medium of words. This is an enrichment which does not consist in objects but in persons who share themselves in dialogue" (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 142).

But this difference is not something artificial. We see what happened in the beginning. The Tempter, the devil, wants to deceive man and woman on this point: he wants to convince them that God has forbidden them to eat the fruit of the tree of [the knowledge of] good and evil in order to keep them submissive. This is precisely the challenge: is the first rule that God gave to man a despot's imposition which forbids and compels, or is it the care of a father who is looking after his little ones and protecting them from self-destruction? Is it a word or a command? The

most tragic among the various lies that the serpent tells Eve is the insinuation of an envious divinity — ‘But no, God envies you’ — of a possessive divinity — ‘God does not want you to be free’. The facts show dramatically that the serpent has lied (cf. Gen 2:16-17; 3:4-5); he made believe that a loving word was a command.

Man is at this crossroads: does God impose things on me or does he take care of me? Are his commandments merely a law or do they contain a *word*, to nurture me? Is God master or Father? God is Father: never forget this. Even in the worst situations, remember that we have a Father who loves us all. Are we subjects or children? This battle, inside and outside of us, is constantly present: 1,000 times we have to choose between a slavish mentality and a mentality of children. A commandment is from the master; a word is from the Father.

The Holy Spirit is a Spirit of children; he is the Spirit of Jesus. A spirit of slaves cannot but view the Law as oppressive, and this can produce two conflicting results: either a life made up of duties and obligations, or a violent reaction of rejection. The whole of Christianity is the passage from the letter of the Law to the life-giving Spirit (cf. 2 Cor 3:6-17). Jesus is the Word of the Father; he is not the condemnation of the Father. Jesus came to save, with his Word, not to condemn us.

One sees whether a man or a woman has lived this transition or not. People realize whether a Christian reasons as a Christian or as a slave.

And we ourselves remember if our teachers took care of us like fathers and mothers, or if they only imposed rules. The Commandments are the journey toward freedom. They set us free because they are the Word of the Father on this journey.

The world needs not legalism but care. It needs Christians with the heart of children.<sup>7</sup> It needs Christians with the heart of children: do not forget this.

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor*, n. 12: “The gift of the Decalogue was a promise and sign of the New Covenant, in which the law would be written in a new and definitive way upon the human heart (cf. Jer 31:31-34), replacing the law of sin which had disfigured that heart (cf. Jer 17:1). In those days, ‘a new heart’ would be given, for in it would dwell ‘a new spirit’, the Spirit of God (cf. Ez 36:24-28)”.

— CHAPTER III —

**First the Red Sea, Then Mount Sinai**

*St Peter's Square  
Wednesday, 27 June 2018*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!*

Today, this Audience is taking place as it did last Wednesday: there are many sick people in the Paul VI Hall. To protect them from the heat, and to make them more comfortable, they are there. But they will follow the Audience on the jumbo screen, and so we are together, that is, there are not two Audiences. There is only one. Let us greet the sick people in the Paul VI Hall. And let us continue speaking about the Commandments which, as we have said, more than commandments are the words of God to his people to help them journey properly, obeying the Father's loving words.

The Ten Words begin in this way: "*I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage*" (Ex 20:2). This beginning would seem foreign to the true and proper laws that follow. But it is not so.

Why does God make this proclamation about himself and about liberation? Because one reaches Mount Sinai after having crossed the Red Sea: the God of Israel first saves, then asks

for trust.<sup>8</sup> In other words: the Decalogue begins from God's generosity. God never asks without giving first. First he saves; first he gives; then he asks. Such is our Father: a good God.

Let us understand the importance of the first declaration: "*I am the Lord, your God*". There is a possessive; there is a relationship; there is belonging. God is not extraneous: he is *your* God.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> In rabbinic tradition there is an enlightening text on the matter: "Why were the 10 words not proclaimed at the beginning of the Torah? ... To what can they be compared? A man, taking on the governing of a city, asked its inhabitants: 'May I govern you?' But they answered: 'What good have you done that you would claim to govern us?' So, what did he do? He built them a protective wall and channels to provide water for the city; then he fought wars for them. And when he asked again: 'May I govern you?', they answered, 'Yes, yes.' Just as the Lord made Israel leave Egypt, split the sea for them, made manna descend for them and water rise from the well, brought them quails flying and lastly fought the war against Amalek for them. And when he asked them: 'May I govern you?', they answered: 'Yes, yes'" ("The gift of the Torah, Commentary on the Decalogue of Ex 20" in R. Ishmael's *Mekilta*, Rome, 1982, p. 49).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est*, 17: "The love-story between God and man consists in the very fact that this communion of will increases in a communion of thought and sentiment, and thus our will and God's will increasingly coincide: God's will is no longer for me an alien will, something imposed on me from without by the commandments, but it is now my own will, based on the realization that God is in fact more deeply present to

This illuminates the entire Decalogue and also reveals the secret of Christian action, because it is the very same attitude of Jesus, who says: “*As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you*” (Jn 15:9). Christ is loved by the Father, and he loves us with that love. He puts not himself but the Father first. Often our deeds fail because we put ourselves, and not gratitude first. And one who begins with himself: where does he end up? He ends up with himself! He is incapable of making headway; he turns in on himself. It is precisely this selfish attitude that, in jest, people say: “that person is just I; me; with me and for me”. He begins and ends with himself.

Christian life is above all the *grateful response* to a generous Father. Christians who only fulfil their ‘*duties*’ do not have a personal experience with that God who is ‘*ours*’. I must do this, this, that.... Only duties. But you lack something! What is the foundation of this duty? The foundation of this duty is the love of God the Father, who gives first, then commands.

Placing the law before the relationship does not help the journey of faith. How can a young person want to be Christian, if we start with obligations, responsibilities, consistency and not with liberation? But being Christian is a journey of liberation! The Commandments free you from your selfishness and free you because it is

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me than I am to myself. Then self-abandonment to God increases and God becomes our joy”.

God's love that leads you forward. Christian formation is not based on willpower, but on the acceptance of salvation, on letting oneself be loved: first the Red Sea, then Mount Sinai. First salvation: God saves his people in the Red Sea; then on Sinai he tells them what they have to do. But those people know that they are doing these things because they have been saved by a Father who loves them.

Gratitude is a characteristic of a heart that has been visited by the Holy Spirit. In order to obey God, it is above all necessary to remember his benefits. Saint Basil says: "Those who do not let such benefits fall into disregard orient themselves towards good virtue and towards all works of justice" (*Shorter Rules*, 56). Where does all this take us? To perform a memory exercise:<sup>10</sup> how many wonderful things God has done for each of us! How generous our Heavenly Father is! I would now like to propose a small exercise in silence. Each can answer in his or her own heart. How many beautiful things has God done for me? This is the question. Let each of us reply in silence. How many beautiful things has God done for me? And this is the liberation of God. God does many beautiful things and he frees us.

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Homily in the Domus Sanctae Marthae*, 7 October 2014: "What is prayer? It means "remembering our history, before God. Because our history" is "the history of his love for us", ore, 10 October 2014, p. 17; cf. *Deti e fatti dei padri del deserto*, Milan 1975, p. 71 "Disregard is the root of all evil".

And yet some may feel that they have not yet truly experienced God's liberation. This can happen. It may be that one looks inside oneself and finds only a sense of duty, a spirituality of servants, not of sons and daughters. What should be done in this case? As the Chosen People did. The Book of Exodus reads: "And the people of Israel groaned under their bondage, and cried out for help, and their cry under bondage came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God saw the people of Israel, and God knew their condition" (Ex 2:23-25). God thinks of me.

God's liberating action placed at the beginning of the Decalogue — that is, the Commandments — is the response to this groaning. We do not save ourselves on our own, but a *cry for help* can escape us: "Lord save me; Lord teach me the way; Lord caress me; Lord give me some joy". This is a cry for help. It is up to us to ask to be liberated from selfishness, from sin, from the chains of slavery. This cry is important. It is prayer; it is being conscious of what is still oppressed and not liberated within us. There are many things fettered in our soul. "Save me; help me; set me free". This is a beautiful prayer to the Lord. God awaits that cry because he can and wants to break our chains. God did not call us to life to remain oppressed but rather to be free and to live in gratitude, obeying with joy to the One who has given us so much, infinitely more than we could ever give to him. This is beautiful. May God always be blessed for all that he has done, does and will do within us!

— CHAPTER IV —

**The First Commandment:  
Idolatry**

*Paul VI Audience Hall  
Wednesday, 1 August 2018*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters Good morning!*

We have heard the first commandment of the Decalogue: “You shall have no other Gods before me” (Ex 20:3). It is good to pause on the theme of *idolatry* which is significant and timely.

The commandment bans us from setting up idols<sup>11</sup> or images<sup>12</sup> of any kind of reality<sup>13</sup>. Indeed, everything can be used as an idol. We are speaking about a human tendency that involves

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<sup>11</sup> The term *Pesel* means “a divine image originally sculpted in wood or stone and mostly in metal” (L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, vol. 3. p. 949).

<sup>12</sup> The term *Temunah* has a very broad meaning which can be reduced to a “likeness, form”; thus the ban is very broad and these images can be of any kind (cf. L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, *Op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 504).

<sup>13</sup> The command does not ban images per se — God himself ordered Moses to make golden cherubs on the cover of the Ark (cf. Ex 25:18) and a bronze serpent (cf. Num 21:8), but he bans these from being worshipped and served, thus the entire process of deification of something, not just its reproduction.

both believers and atheists. For example, we Christians can ask ourselves: who is truly my God? Is it the One and Triune Love or is it my image, my personal success, perhaps even within the Church? “Idolatry not only refers to false pagan worship. It remains a constant temptation to faith. Idolatry consists in divinizing what is not God” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 2113).

What is a “god” on the existential plane? It is what is at the centre of one’s life and on whom one’s actions and thoughts depend.<sup>14</sup> One can grow up in a family that is Christian in name but that is actually centred on reference points that are foreign to the Gospel.<sup>15</sup> Human beings cannot live without being centred on something. And so the world offers the ‘supermarket’ of idols, which can be objects, images, ideas and roles. For example, even prayer. We must pray to God, our Father. I remember one day I had gone to a parish in the Diocese of Buenos Aires

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<sup>14</sup> The Hebrew Bible refers to Canaanite idolatry with the term *Ba'al* which means “lordship, intimate relationship, reality on which one depends”. The idol is domineering, takes the heart and becomes a pivot of life (cf. *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, 257-251).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 2114: “Idolatry is a perversion of man’s innate religious sense. An idolater is someone who ‘transfers his indestructible notion of God to anything other than God’ (Origene, *Contra Celsum*, 2, 40)”.

to celebrate Mass and after that, I had to celebrate Confirmation in another parish that was a kilometre away. I went on foot and I walked across a beautiful park. But in that park, there were over 50 tables with two chairs each, and people were seated facing each other. What were they doing? Tarot cards. They went there “to pray” to their idol. Instead of praying to God who is the Providence of the future, they went there to have their fortunes told, to see the future. This is one form of the idolatry of our times. I ask you: how many of you have gone to have your cards read to see the future? How many of you, for example, have gone to have your hands read to see the future instead of praying to the Lord? This is the difference: the Lord is alive. The others are idols, forms of idolatry that are unnecessary.

How does idolatry develop? The commandment describes the various phases: “You shall not make for yourself a graven image or any likeness ... you shall not bow down to them or serve them” (Ex 20:4-5).

The word ‘*idol*’ in Greek is derived from the verb ‘*to see*’.<sup>16</sup> An idol is a ‘*vision*’ which has the tendency to become a fixation, an obsession. The idol in reality is a projection of self onto objects or projects. Advertizing, for example, uses this dynamic: I cannot see the object itself but I

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<sup>16</sup> The etymology of the Greek *eidolon*, derived from *eidōs* is from the root word *weid* which means *to see* (cf. *Grande Lessico dell’Antico Testamento*, Brescia 1967, vol. iii, p. 127).

can perceive that car, that smartphone, that role — or other things — as a means of fulfilling myself and responding to my basic needs. And I seek it out, I speak of it, I think of it: the idea of owning that object or fulfilling that project, reaching that position, seems a marvelous path to happiness, a tower with which to reach the heavens (cf. Gen 11:1-19), and then everything serves that goal.

We then enter the second phase: “*You shall not bow down to them*”. Idols need worship, certain rituals: one bows down and sacrifices everything to them. In ancient times, there were human sacrifices to idols, but today too: children are sacrificed for a career, or neglected or, quite simply, not conceived. Beauty demands human sacrifices. How many hours are spent in front of the mirror! How much do some people, some women, spend on makeup? This too is idolatry. It is not bad to wear makeup but in a normal way, not to become a goddess. Beauty demands human sacrifices. Fame demands the immolation of self, of one’s innocence and authenticity. Idols demand blood. Money robs one of life, and pleasure leads to loneliness. Economic structures sacrifice human life for greater profit. Let us think of unemployed people. Why? Because at times the businessmen of that company, of that firm have decided to lay off those people in order to earn more money. The idol of money. We live in hypocrisy, doing and saying what others expect because the god of one’s self affirmation imposes it. And lives are ruined, families are destroyed and young people are left prey to destructive models in order to increase profit.

Drugs too are idols. How many young people ruin their health, even their lives, by worshipping the idol of drugs?

And here we come to the third and most tragic phase: and *you shall not serve them*, he says. Idols enslave. They promise happiness but do not deliver it and we find ourselves living for that thing or that vision, drawn into a self-destructive vortex, waiting for a result that never comes.

Dear brothers and sisters, idols promise life but in reality they take it away. The true God does not demand life but gives it, as a gift. The true God does not offer a projection of our success but teaches us how to love. The true God does not demand children but gives his Son for us. Idols project future hypotheses and make us despise the present. The true God teaches how to live in everyday reality, in a practical way, not with illusions about the future: today and tomorrow and the day after tomorrow, walking towards the future; the concreteness of the true God against the fluidity of idols. Today, I invite you to think: how many idols do I have and which one is my favourite? Because recognizing one's own forms of idolatry is the beginning of grace and puts one on the path of love. Indeed love is incompatible with idolatry. If something becomes absolute and supreme, then it is more important than a spouse, than a child or a friendship. Being attached to an object or an idea makes one blind to love. And so, in order to pursue idols, one idol, one can even renounce a father, a mother, children, a wife, a husband, a family ... the dearest things of all. Being attached

to an object or an idea makes us blind to love. Take this to heart: idols rob us of love, idols make us blind to love and, in order to truly love, we must be free from all idols.

What is my idol? Remove it and throw it out of the window!

— CHAPTER V —

**The First Commandment:  
The Desert and Idolatry**

*Paul VI Audience Hall  
Wednesday, 8 August 2018*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!*

Today let us continue to meditate on the Decalogue, and to look more closely at the theme of *idolatry*; we spoke about it last week. Now let us take up the theme again because it is very important to know about it. And, let us take our cue from the idol *par excellence*, the golden calf, which the Book of Exodus (32:1-8) describes — we have just heard a passage from it. This episode has a precise context: the desert where the people await Moses who has gone up the mountain to receive God’s instructions.

What is *the desert*? It is a place where uncertainty and insecurity reign — there is nothing in the desert — where there is no water, no food and no shelter. The desert is an image of human life, whose condition is uncertain and has no inviolable guarantees. This insecurity creates a primal anxiety in mankind which Jesus mentions in the Gospel: “What shall we eat? What shall we drink? What shall we wear?” (Mt 6:31). These are primal anxieties. And the desert causes these anxieties.

And something occurs in that desert which triggers idolatry. “Moses delayed to come down

from the mountain” (Ex 32:1). He remained there for 40 days and the people grew impatient. The reference point was missing: Moses, the leader, the one in charge, the reassuring guide; and this became unbearable. Thus, the people called for a visible god — this is the snare into which the people fell — in order to identify and orient themselves. And they said to Aaron: “make us gods, who shall go before us” (v. 1); make us a leader, make us a chief. In order to escape uncertainty — the uncertainty is the desert — human nature seeks a do-it-yourself religion. If God does not show himself, then we custom-make one for ourselves. “Before an idol, there is no risk that we will be called to abandon our security, for idols ‘have mouths, but they cannot speak’ (Ps 115:5). Idols exist, we begin to see, as a pretext for setting ourselves at the centre of reality and worshipping the work of our own hands” (*Lumen Fidei*, 13).

Aaron is unable to refuse the people’s request, and he makes a *golden calf*. The calf had a double meaning in the ancient Near East: on the one hand it represented fertility and abundance, and on the other, energy and strength. But first and foremost, it was golden, thus, a symbol of wealth, success, power and money. These are the great idols: success, power and money. They are timeless temptations! This is what the golden calf is: the symbol of all desires that give the illusion of freedom but instead enslave, because an idol always enslaves; it has charm and you succumb; the charm of the serpent who looks at the little bird and the bird is unable to move, and

the serpent gets him. Aaron was unable to refuse.

But above all, everything stems from the inability to confide in God, to place our insecurities in him, to allow him to give true depth to the desires of our hearts. This also allows us to sustain weakness, uncertainty and precariousness. Referring to God makes us strong in weakness, in uncertainty and also in precariousness. Without God's primacy one can easily fall into idolatry and settle for poor reassurances. But this is a temptation which we always read about in the Bible. And consider this carefully: it did not cost God much effort to free the people from Egypt: he did so with signs of power, of love. But God's great work was to remove Egypt from the hearts of the people, that is, to remove idolatry from the people's hearts. And again, God continues to work to remove it from our hearts. This is God's great work: to remove "that Egypt" which we carry within us, which is the attraction of idolatry.

When we welcome the God of Jesus Christ who was rich and became poor for us (cf. 2 Cor 8:9), then we discover that recognizing one's weaknesses is not a disgrace of human life, but the condition necessary to open up to the One who is truly strong. Thus, God's salvation enters through the door of weakness (cf. 2 Cor 12:10). It is due to man's own inadequacies that he opens up to the paternity of God. Mankind's *freedom* comes from allowing the true God to be the only Lord, and this allows one to *accept one's fragility* and *reject the idols in one's heart*.

We Christians turn our gaze to *Christ crucified* (cf. Jn 19:37) who was weak, insulted and stripped of all his possessions. But the face of the true God is revealed in him, the true glory of love and not that of glittering deceit. Isaiah says: “he was wounded by our transgressions” (Is 53:5). We were healed by the very weakness of a man who was God, by his wounds. And through our weaknesses, we can open up to God’s salvation. Our healing comes from the One who became poor, who welcomed failure, who undertook to bear our insecurity until the end, in order to fill it with love and strength. He comes to reveal God’s paternity to us. In Christ our fragility is no longer a curse but a place of encounter with the Father and the wellspring of a new strength from above.

— CHAPTER VI —

**The Second Commandment:  
“Hallowed be thy name”**

*Paul VI Audience Hall  
Wednesday, 22 August 2018*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good Morning!*

Let us continue our catechesis on the Commandments. Today we shall focus on the Commandment “*You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain*” (Ex 20:7). We rightly interpret these words as an invitation not to offend the name of God and to avoid using it inappropriately. This clear meaning prepares us for a more in-depth look at these precious words: not to take the name of God inappropriately or in vain.

Let us listen to them more closely. The precept “you shall not take” translates an expression which, both in Hebrew and in Greek, literally means “*you shall not take upon yourself, you shall not assume*”.

The expression “in vain” is clearer and means “*idly, vainly*”. It refers to an empty casing, a form that has no content. It is a trait of hypocrisy, of formality and lies and of using words or the name of God, but idly, without truth.

In the Bible a *name* is the intimate truth of things and, above all, of individuals. A name often represents a mission. For example, Abraham in

Genesis (cf. 17:5) and Simon Peter in the Gospels (cf. Jn 1:42) received a new name to indicate the change in the direction of their lives. And truly knowing the name of God leads to the transformation of one's life: from the moment Moses learned God's name, his story changed (cf. Ex 3:13-15).

In Hebrew rites, the name of God was solemnly proclaimed on the Great Day of Forgiveness, when the people were forgiven because, through one's name, one comes into contact with God's very life, which is mercy.

Thus, "*to take the name of God upon oneself*" means to assume his reality, to enter into a strong relationship, a close relationship with him. For us Christians, this Commandment is the call to remind ourselves that we were baptized "*in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*", as we affirm each time we make the sign of the Cross, in order to carry out our daily actions in heartfelt and true communion with God, that is, in his love. And on this topic, making the sign of the Cross, I would like to repeat once again: teach your children to make the sign of the Cross. Have you seen how children do it? If you say to children: "make the sign of the Cross", they do something that they do not know about. They do not know how to make the sign of the Cross! Teach them how to do it: in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. A child's first act of faith. This is your homework, homework to do: teach children to make the sign of the Cross.

One may wonder: is it possible to take the name of God upon oneself in a hypocritical way, as an empty formality? Unfortunately, the answer is in the affirmative. Yes it is possible. One can live in a false relationship with God. Jesus used to say of the doctors of the law: they did some things, but they did not do what God wanted. They spoke of God, but they did not do God's will. The advice that Jesus gives us is: "Do what they say but not what they do". One can have a false relationship with God, like those people. And this precept from the Decalogue is precisely an invitation to have a relationship with God that is not false, that is without hypocrisy; a relationship in which we entrust ourselves to him with all that we are. After all, until the day we stake everything on the Lord, by experiencing firsthand that life can be found in him, we are only theorizing.

This is Christianity which moves hearts. Why are saints able to move hearts? Because not only do saints speak, they act! Our hearts are moved when a saint speaks to us, tells us things. And they are able to do so because, in saints, we can see what our heart profoundly desires: authenticity, true relationships, radicalism. And this can also be seen in "the saints next door" who, for example, are the many parents who set for their children an example of a consistent, simple, honest and generous life.

If more Christians were to take God's name upon themselves without falsehood — by honouring the first request of the Our Father: "*hallowed be thy name*" — the Church's message would receive more attention and would be

more credible. If our daily life were to manifest God's name, we would see how beautiful Baptism is and what a great gift the Eucharist is; what sublime union there is between our body and the Body of Christ; Christ in us and we in him! United! This is not hypocrisy, this is truth. This is not speaking or praying like a parrot. This is praying from the heart, loving the Lord.

From the Cross of Christ onwards, no one can despise themselves and think badly of their life. No one and never! No matter what they may have done. Because *the name of each of us is on Christ's shoulders*. He carries us! It is worthwhile to take God's name upon ourselves because he took our names upon himself, to the very end, including the evil that is within us. He burdened himself, in order to forgive us, to place his love in our hearts. This is why in this Commandment, God proclaimed: "Take me upon yourself as I have taken you upon me".

Anyone, in whatever situation they may be, can invoke the Holy name of the Lord, who is faithful and merciful Love. God will never say 'no' to a heart that invokes him sincerely. And let us return to the assignment to be done at home: teach children to make the sign of the Cross properly.

— CHAPTER VII —

**The Third Commandment:  
The Day of Rest**

*St Peter's Square  
Wednesday, 5 September 2018*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!*

The journey through the Decalogue takes us today to the Commandment regarding the day of rest. It sounds like an easy command to respect, but that is the wrong impression. True rest is not simple, because there is false rest and true rest. How can we recognize them?

Today's society thirsts for amusement and holidays. The entertainment industry is really flourishing, and advertising portrays the ideal world as one great amusement park where everyone has fun. The prevailing concept of *life* today does not have its centre of gravity in activity and commitment, but in *escapism*. Earning money to have fun, to satisfy oneself. The model is the image of a successful person who can afford ample room for diverse forms of enjoyment. But this mentality makes one slip toward the dissatisfaction of a life anaesthetized by fun that is not rest, but alienation and the escape from reality. Man has never rested as much as today, yet man has never experienced as much emptiness as today! Opportunities to amuse oneself, to go out, cruises, travels; but many things do not give you fullness of heart. Indeed: they do not give you rest.

The words of the Decalogue seek and find the crux of the problem, casting a different light on what rest is. The commandment has a particular element: it provides a motive. Rest in the name of the Lord has a precise reason: “For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it” (Ex 20:11).

This takes us back to the end of creation, when God says: “God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good” (Gen 1:31). And so begins the day of rest, which is God’s joy for all that he has created. It is the day of contemplation and blessing.

What, then, is rest according to this commandment? It is the moment of contemplation, it is the moment of praise, not that of escapism. It is the time to look at reality and say: how beautiful life is! Contrary to rest as an escape from reality, the Decalogue proposes rest as the *blessing of reality*. For us Christians, the centre of the Lord’s day, Sunday, is the Eucharist, which means “*thanksgiving*”. It is the day to say to God: thank you Lord for life, for your mercy, for all your gifts. Sunday is not the day to forget the other days but to remember them, bless them and make peace with life. How many people there are who have many opportunities to amuse themselves, who are not at peace with life! Sunday is the day to make peace with life, saying: life is precious; it is not easy, sometimes it is painful, but it is precious.

To be introduced to authentic rest is a work of God in us, but it requires us to distance ourselves from the devil and his attraction (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 83). In fact, it is very easy for the heart to succumb to unhappiness, dwelling on reasons for discontent. Blessing and joy imply an openness to good that is a mature movement of the heart. Goodness is loving and is never imposed. It is chosen.

Peace is chosen; it cannot be imposed and it is not found by chance. Distancing himself from the bitter wounds of his heart, man needs to make peace with what he is fleeing from. It is necessary to reconcile oneself with one's own history, with facts that one does not accept, with the difficult parts of one's own existence. I ask you: is each of you reconciled with your own history? A question to ponder: Am I reconciled with my own history? True peace, in fact, is not about changing one's own history but about welcoming it and valuing it, just as it has unfolded.

How many times have we met sick Christians who have comforted us with a serenity that is not found in pleasure-seekers and hedonists! And we have seen humble and poor people rejoice in little graces with a happiness that knew of eternity.

The Lord says in Deuteronomy: "I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live" (30:19). This choice is the "*fiat*" of the Virgin Mary; it is an opening to the Holy Spirit who places us in the footsteps of Christ, the One who gives himself to the Father in the

most dramatic moment and thus takes the path that leads to the Resurrection.

When does life become beautiful? When we begin to think well of it, whatever our history. When the gift of a doubt makes its way: that all is grace<sup>17</sup>, and that holy thought breaks down the inner wall of dissatisfaction, giving way to authentic rest. Life becomes beautiful when the heart opens to Providence and one discovers that what the Psalm says is true: “For God alone my soul waits in silence” (62[61]:2; 5). This passage from the Psalm is beautiful: “For God alone my soul waits in silence”.

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<sup>17</sup> As Saint Theresa of the Child Jesus reminds us in G. Bernanos’ “Diary of a Country Priest”, Milan, 1965, 270.

— CHAPTER VIII —

**The Third Commandment:  
Freedom and the Day of Rest**

*St Peter's Square  
Wednesday, 12 September 2018*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters Good morning!*

In today's catechesis we return again to the *third Commandment*, the one regarding the day of rest. The Decalogue proclaimed in the Book of Exodus is repeated in the Book of Deuteronomy almost identically, except for this Third Word in which a precious difference appears: whereas in Exodus the motive for rest is the *blessing of creation*, in Deuteronomy, it commemorates the *end of slavery*. On this day, the slave has to rest just like the owner, to celebrate the memory of the Passover of liberation.

Indeed by definition, slaves cannot rest. But there are many forms of slavery, both interior and external constraints. There are exterior coercions such as oppression, lives seized by violence and other types of injustice. There are interior prisons which are for example, mental blocks, complexes, character limitations and more. Is there rest under these conditions? Can a recluse or an oppressed man or woman be free? And can a person who is tormented by inner difficulties be free?

Actually, there are people who experience great freedom of spirit even in prison. Let us think for

example of Saint Maximilian Kolbe or Cardinal Van Thuan who transformed dark oppression into places of light. There are also people marked by great interior fragility who, however, know about the rest of mercy and how to transmit this. God's mercy frees us. And when you encounter God's mercy, you feel great interior freedom and you are also able to transmit it. This is why it is important to open oneself to God's mercy so as not to be slaves to ourselves.

What then is true freedom? Does it consist, perhaps, in the freedom of choice? Certainly this is part of freedom and we commit ourselves to ensure this to every man and woman (cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 73). But we very well know that being able to do what one wants is not enough to be truly free nor even to be happy. True freedom is much more.

Indeed there is slavery which shackles more than a prison, more than a panic attack, more than any other kind of imposition: it is *slavery to one's ego*.<sup>18</sup> Those people who spend the whole day in front of the mirror in order to see their ego. And one's own ego is taller than one's body. They are slaves to their ego. One's ego can become a slave driver that tortures a person wherever he or she is, and causes that person the greatest oppression, namely "sin", which is not the banal

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1733: "The choice to disobey and do evil is an abuse of freedom and leads to 'the slavery of sin'".

breach of a code, but the failure of existence and the condition of slavery (cf. Jn 8:34).<sup>19</sup> In the end, the ego is sin, saying: “I want to do this and I do not care if there is a limit, if there is a commandment, and I do not even care if there is love”.

Let us think, for example of ego in human passions: the glutton, the lustful, the miserly, the quick tempered, the envious, the bitter, the arrogant — and so forth — they are slaves to their vices which oppress and torment them. There is no relief for the greedy because gluttony is the hypocrisy of the stomach that is full but makes one think it is empty. The hypocritical stomach makes one a glutton. We are slaves to the hypocritical stomach. There is no respite for the glutton and the lustful who must live for pleasure; the anxiety of possession destroys the miser; they always hoard money, hurting others; the fire of anger and the woodworm of envy ruin relationships. Writers say that envy makes the body and soul yellow, like a person with hepatitis: they turn yellow. The envious have a yellow soul because they can never have the fresh complexion of a healthy soul. Envy destroys.

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1739: “Freedom and sin. Man’s freedom is limited and fallible. In fact, man failed. He freely sinned. By refusing God’s plan of love, he deceived himself and became a slave to sin. This first alienation engendered a multitude of others. From its outset, human history attests the wretchedness and oppression born of the human heart in consequence of the abuse of freedom”.

Bitterness which eschews all effort and makes life impossible; arrogant egocentricity; that ego I was talking about digs a trench between itself and others.

Dear brothers and sisters, who then is the real slave? Who is the one who knows no rest? Those who are not capable of love! And all these vices, these sins, this egoism distance us from love and they make us unable to love. We are our own slaves and we cannot love because love is always outgoing.

The third Commandment which invites us to celebrate freedom with rest is, for us Christians, a prophecy of the Lord Jesus who breaks the interior slavery of sin, in order to make mankind capable of loving. True love is true freedom: it detaches us from possession, rebuilds relationships, knows how to welcome and value others, transforms all toil into a joyful gift and makes us capable of communion. Love makes people free even in prison, even if one is weak and limited.

This is the freedom that we receive from our Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ.

— CHAPTER IX —

**The Fourth Commandment:  
“Honour your father and your mother”**

*St Peter's Square  
Wednesday, 19 September 2018*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!*

On the journey within the Ten Words, today we come to the Commandment on the father and mother. It speaks of the honour owed to parents. What is this ‘*honour*’? The Hebrew term indicates glory, value, literally ‘importance’, consistent with reality. It is not a question of external forms but of truth. To honour God, in the Scriptures, means recognizing his reality, acknowledging his presence; this is also expressed with rites, but above all it means giving God his proper place in life. Thus, honouring our father and mother also means recognizing their importance with practical actions, which express dedication, affection and care. But it is more than this.

The Fourth Word has a particular characteristic: it is the Commandment that contains a result. In fact, it says: “Honour your father and your mother, as the Lord your God commanded you; *that your days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with you, in the land which the Lord your God gives you*” (Dt 5:16). Honouring our parents leads to a long and happy life. The word ‘well’ in the Decalogue appears only linked to the relationship with parents.

This pluri-millennial wisdom declares what human sciences have been able to establish for just a little more than a century: that the influence of childhood marks our entire life. It can often be easy to understand if someone has grown up in a healthy and balanced environment. But likewise to understand if a person has experienced neglect or violence. Our childhood is a bit like indelible ink; it is evident in tastes, in ways of being, even if some try to hide the wounds of their own origins.

But the fourth Commandment tells us even more. It does not speak of parents' goodness; it does not ask that fathers and mothers be perfect. It speaks about an act of the child, apart from the merits of the parents, and says something extraordinary and liberating: even if not all parents are good and not every childhood serene, all children can be happy, because achieving a full and happy life depends on the proper recognition of those who have brought us into the world.

Let us think about how this Word can be constructive for many young people who come from stories of pain and for all those who have suffered in their own youth. Many saints — and countless Christians — after a painful childhood, have lived a luminous life, because, thanks to Jesus Christ, they became reconciled with life. Let us consider that young man — blessed now and next month a saint — Sulprizio, who at 19 years of age ended his life reconciled, despite much suffering, with many issues, because his heart was at peace and he never denied his parents. Let us think of Saint Camillus de

Lellis, who from a disorderly childhood built a life of love and of service; of Saint Josephine Bakhita, who grew up in terrible slavery; or of Blessed Carlo Gnocchi, orphaned and poor; and of Saint himself, marked by the loss of his mother at a tender age.

People, from whatever background they come, receive from this Commandment the direction that leads to Christ: indeed, manifest in him is the true Father, who invites us to be ‘*born anew*’ *from above* (cf. Jn 3:3-8). The enigma of our lives is illuminated when we discover that God has always prepared for us a life as his children, where every act is a mission received from him.

Our wounds begin to be strengths when we discover by grace that the true enigma is no longer ‘*why?*’ but ‘*for whom?*’; for whom did this happen to me? In view of what result did God mould me throughout my history? Here everything is overturned; everything becomes precious; everything becomes constructive. How can my even sad and painful experience become, in the light of love, a source of salvation for others — for whom? So we can begin to honour our parents with the freedom of adult children and with merciful acceptance of their limitations.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. Saint Augustine, *Sermon on Matthew*, 72, a, 4: “Thus Christ teaches you to reject your parents, and at the same time to love them. Thus, parents are loved systematically and with the spirit of faith when they are not preferred over God: ‘one who loves’ — these are the words of the Lord — ‘his father and

Honour parents: they gave us life! If you are distant from your parents, make an effort and return, go back to them; perhaps they are elderly.... They gave you life. Then, there is a habit among us to say bad things, even to curse.... Please, never, never ever insult other people's parents. Never! One should never insult a mother, never insult a father. Never! Never! Take this interior decision yourselves: from now on I will never insult anyone's mother or father. They gave life! They must never be insulted.

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mother more than me is not worthy of me'. With these words he almost seems to admonish you not to love them; but instead, on the contrary, he is admonishing you to love them. In fact he could have said: 'one who loves his father or mother is not worthy of me'. But he did not say this, so as not to speak against the law given by him, since it was He who, through his servant Moses, gave the law in which it is written: 'Honour your father and your mother'. He did not promulgate a contrary law but confirmed it; then, he taught you the order; he did not eliminate the duty of love owed to parents: one who loves his father and mother, but more than me. Therefore, one must love them, but not more than me: God is God, man is man. Love your parents, obey your parents, honour you parents; but if God calls you to a more important mission, in which affection for your parents could be an impediment, respect the order, do not suppress charity".

This wonderful life is offered to us, not imposed: reborn in Christ is a grace to be freely accepted (cf. Jn 1:11-13), and it is the treasure of our Baptism, in which, by the work of the Holy Spirit, we have only one Father, the one in heaven (cf. Mt 23:9; 1 Cor 8:6; Eph 4:6). Thank you!

— CHAPTER X —

**The Fifth Commandment:  
Lover of Life**

*St Peter's Square  
Wednesday, 10 October 2018*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!*

Today's catechesis is dedicated to the Fifth Word: *You shall not kill*. The fifth Commandment: *you shall not kill*. We are already in the second part of the Decalogue, the part which deals with relationships with our neighbour. And, with its concise and categorical formulation, this commandment rises up like a wall to defend the basic values of human relationships. And what is the basic value in human relationships?: the value of life.<sup>21</sup> Thus, *you shall not kill*.

One could say that all the evil carried out in the world can be summed up in this: contempt for life. Life is assailed by war, by organizations that exploit people — we read in newspapers or

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction *Donum Vitae*, 5: aas 80 (1988), 76-77: “Human life is sacred because from its beginning it involves ‘the creative action of God’ and it remains forever in a special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole end. God alone is the Lord of life from its beginning until its end: no one can, in any circumstance, claim for himself the right to destroy directly an innocent human being”.

see in newscasts many facts — by speculations on creation and by the throwaway culture and by every system that subjugates human existence to calculated opportunities, while a scandalous number of people live in a state unworthy of mankind. This is having contempt for life, that is, in some way, killing.

A contradictory approach even permits the termination of human life in the maternal womb, in the name of safeguarding other rights. But how can an action that ends an innocent and defenceless life in its blossoming stage be therapeutic, civilized or simply human? I ask you: is it right to ‘do away with’ a human life in order to solve a problem? Is it right to hire a hit man in order to solve a problem? One cannot. It is not right to ‘do away with’ a human being, however small, in order to solve a problem. It is like hiring a hit man to solve a problem.

Where does all this come from? Violence and the rejection of life; where do they actually come from? From fear. Indeed, welcoming others is a challenge to individualism. Let us think, for example, about when it is discovered that a new life has a disability, even a serious one. In these tragic cases, parents need true closeness, true solidarity to face the reality and overcome the understandable fears. However, they often receive hasty advice to interrupt the pregnancy, which is an expression: ‘interrupting the pregnancy’ means ‘doing away with someone’, directly.

A sick child is like any other needy person on earth, like an elderly person who needs assistance, like many poor people who struggle to get by. He or she who is seen as a problem is in reality a gift from God that can save me from egocentrism and help me to grow in love. Vulnerable life shows us the way out, the way to save ourselves from a life that withdraws into itself and to discover the joy of love. And here I would like to pause to thank, to thank the many volunteers, to thank Italy's strong volunteerism, the strongest I have ever known. Thank you.

And what leads man to reject life? It is the idols of this world: money — better to get rid of this one because it will be costly —, power, success. These are the wrong parameters for evaluating life. What is the only authentic measure of life? It is love, the love with which God loves it! The love with which God loves life: this is the measure. The love with which God loves all human life.

Indeed, what is the positive meaning of the Word “you shall not kill”? That God is a “*lover of life*”, as we heard a short time ago in the Bible passage.

The secret of life is revealed to us by the way it was regarded by the Son of God who became man, to the point of assuming on the Cross rejection, weakness, poverty and suffering (cf. Jn 13:1). In every sick child, in every weak elderly person, in every desperate migrant, in every fragile and threatened life. Christ is seeking us

(cf. Mt 25:34-46), he is seeking our heart, to open us up to the joy of love.

It is worthwhile to welcome every life because every man and woman is worth the blood of Christ himself (cf. 1 Pt 1:18-19). We cannot have contempt for what God has loved so much!

We must tell the men and women of the world: do not have contempt for life! The life of others, but also one's own life because the Commandment "thou shall not kill" applies to it too. Many young people should be told, "do not have contempt for your life. Stop rejecting God's work! You are a work of God! Do not underestimate yourself, do not despise yourself with the addictions that will ruin you and lead you to death!

May no one measure life according to the deceptions of this world, but instead may each one accept him or herself and others in the name of the Father who created us. He is a "*lover of life*": this is beautiful. "God is a lover of life". And we are all so dear to him that he sent his Son for us. In fact, the Gospel says: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son; that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16).

— CHAPTER XI —

**The Fifth Commandment:  
The First Step to Loving**

*St Peter's Square  
Wednesday, 17 October 2018*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!*

Today I would like to continue the catechesis on the Fifth Word of the Decalogue, “*You shall not kill*”. We have already emphasized how this Commandment reveals that in God’s eyes human life is precious, sacred and inviolable. No one can have contempt for his own or another’s life; indeed, man bears God’s image within and is the object of His infinite love, in whatever condition he was called into existence.

In the Gospel passage we listened to a short time ago, Jesus reveals to us an even deeper meaning of this Commandment. He affirms that, before God’s tribunal, even ire against a brother or sister is a form of murder. This is why the Apostle John would write: “Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer” (1 Jn 3:15). But Jesus does not stop at this, and in the same logic he adds that even insult and contempt can kill. And we are used to insulting, it is true. We tend to insult like exhaling. And Jesus tells us: ‘Stop, because an insult does harm; it kills’. Contempt. ‘But I detest these people, this person’. And this is a way of killing a person’s dignity. It would be nice if this teaching of Jesus were to enter the mind and heart, and each of us would say: ‘I will

never insult anyone'. It would be a fine objective, because Jesus tells us: 'Look, if you harbour contempt, if you insult, if you hate, this is murder'.

No human code equates such different acts, assigning them the same level of justice. And consistently, Jesus actually exhorts us to interrupt the offering of sacrifice in the temple if we remember that we have offended a brother, in order to go and find him and reconcile with him. Also, when we go to Mass, we should have this attitude of reconciliation with the people we have had differences with. Even if we have thought ill of them, we have insulted them. But many times, while we are waiting for the priest to come and say Mass, we gossip a little and speak ill of others. But we cannot do this. Let us think about the gravity of an insult, of contempt, of hatred: Jesus equates them to killing.

What does Jesus mean by extending the field of the Fifth Word to this point? Man has a noble, very sensitive life, and has a hidden 'I' no less important than his physical being. Indeed, an inopportune phrase is enough to offend the innocence of a child. A cold gesture can suffice to wound a woman. To break a young person's heart, it suffices to rebuff his confidence. To annihilate a man, it suffices to ignore him. Indifference kills. It is like telling the other person: 'you are dead to me', because you have killed him in your heart. Not loving is the first step to killing; and *not killing* is the first step to loving.

At the beginning of the Bible, we read the terrible phrase that issues from the lips of the first murderer, Cain, after the Lord asks him where his brother is. Cain responds: “I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?” (Gen 4:9).<sup>22</sup> This is how assassins speak: ‘it is not my concern’, ‘that is your business’, and similar assertions. Let us try to answer this question: are we our brothers’ keepers? Yes, we are! We are each other’s keepers! And this is the path to life; it is the path of not killing.

Human life needs love. And what is authentic love? It is what Christ showed us, namely, mercy. The love we cannot forego is forgiveness, which accepts those who have wronged us. None of us can survive without mercy; we all need forgiveness. Therefore, if to kill means to destroy, terminate, eliminate someone, then *not to kill* would mean to care for, appreciate, include. And also forgive.

No one can delude him or herself: ‘I am fine because I do nothing wrong’. A mineral or plant

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2259: “In the account of Abel’s murder by his brother Cain, Scripture reveals the presence of anger and envy in man, consequences of original sin, from the beginning of human history. Man has become the enemy of his fellow man. God declares the wickedness of this fratricide: ‘What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand’ (Gen 4:10-11)”.

has this type of existence, however, man does not. A person — man or woman — does not. More is asked of a man or woman. There is good to be done, prepared for each of us, each his or her own, which makes us ourselves at the core. ‘*You shall not kill*’ is an appeal to love and mercy; it is a call to live according to the Lord Jesus, who gave his life for us and rose for us. Once, here in the Square, we all repeated together a Saint’s expression about this. Perhaps it will help us: ‘It is good to do no wrong, but it is wrong to do no good’. We must always do good; go a step further.

The Lord, who by becoming flesh sanctified our existence; he, who with his blood made our life invaluable; he, “the Author of life” (Acts 3:15), thanks to whom each one is a gift of the Father. In him, in his love stronger than death, and by the power of the Spirit whom the Father gives us, we can accept the Word “*You shall not kill*” as the most important and essential appeal: that is, ‘you shall not kill’ signifies a call to love.

— CHAPTER XII —

**The Sixth Commandment:  
The Call to Fidelity**

*St Peter's Square  
Wednesday, 24 October 2018*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!*

Our series of catecheses on the Commandments brings us today to the Sixth Word, which addresses the sentimental and sexual dimension, and states: “*You shall not commit adultery*”.

The immediate call is to fidelity, and indeed no human relationship is authentic without fidelity and loyalty.

One cannot love only as long as it is ‘convenient’; love is truly manifested beyond the threshold of one’s own personal advantage, when one gives unreservedly. As the *Catechism* states: “Love seeks to be definitive; it cannot be an arrangement ‘until further notice’” (n. 1646). Fidelity is an attribute of a free, mature and responsible human relationship. Friends, too, reveal themselves as authentic because they remain so in all circumstances, otherwise they are not friends. Christ reveals authentic love; the One who lives in the boundless love of the Father, is, on this strength, the faithful Friend who welcomes us even when we err, and who always wants good for us, even when we do not deserve it.

Human beings need to be loved unconditionally and those who do not receive this acceptance carry a certain incompleteness within themselves, often without knowing it. The human heart seeks to fill this void with surrogates, accepting compromises and mediocrity that have only a vague flavour of love. The risk is to call certain bitter and immature relationships ‘love’, with the illusion of finding the light of life in something that, at best, is merely a reflection of it.

Thus it can happen, for example, that one overestimates physical attraction, which is itself a gift from God, but aims to pave the way for an authentic and faithful relationship with the person. As Saint John Paul II used to say, the human being “is called to a full and mature spontaneity of relationships”, which is “the gradual fruit of discerning the impulses in one’s own heart”. It is something that is acquired, because every human being must “learn with determination and consistency what the body signifies” (cf. *Catechesis*, 12 November 1980).

The call to married life, therefore, requires a heartfelt discernment of the quality of the relationship and a period of engagement to confirm it. To approach the Sacrament of Marriage, the engaged couple must establish the certainty that the hand of God is in their bond and that he precedes and accompanies them and will enable them to say: *With the Grace of Christ I promise to be faithful to you always*. They cannot promise each other fidelity “*in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health*”, and to love and honour one another all the days of their lives, solely

on the basis of good will or of the hope that it 'will work out'. They need to ground themselves on the solid terrain of God's faithful Love. And this is why, before receiving the Sacrament of Matrimony, there should be a careful preparation, I would say a catechumenate, because with love one's entire life is at stake, and one does not kid around with love. Three or four meetings in the parish church cannot be defined as 'marriage preparation': no, this is not preparation: this is feigned preparation. And the responsibility falls on those who do this: on the parish priest, on the bishop who permits these things. The preparation must be mature and it takes time. It is not a formality: it is a Sacrament. But it must be prepared with a true catechumenate.

Indeed, fidelity is a way of being, a style of life. One works with loyalty, one speaks with sincerity, one remains faithful to the truth in one's thoughts, in one's actions. A life woven of fidelity is expressed in all dimensions and leads to being faithful and reliable men and women in every circumstance.

However, to achieve such a beautiful life, our human nature is not enough. God's fidelity needs to enter our being, to infect us. This Sixth Word calls us to turn our gaze to Christ whose fidelity can remove from us an adulterous heart and give us a faithful heart. In him and only in him, is there love without reservations and second thoughts, absolute and unmitigated giving, and the tenacity of full acceptance.

From his death and resurrection comes our fidelity, from his unconditional love comes steadfastness in relationships. From communion with him, with the Father and with the Holy Spirit comes communion among us and the ability to live our bonds in fidelity.

— CHAPTER XIII —

**The Sixth Commandment:  
The Call to Spousal Love**

*St Peter's Square  
Wednesday, 31 October 2018*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!*

Today I would like to complete the catechesis on the Sixth Word of the Decalogue, “You shall not commit adultery”, highlighting that the faithful love of Christ is the light by which to live the beauty of human affection. Indeed, our sentimental dimension is a *call to love* that is manifested in fidelity, in welcoming, and in mercy. This is very important. How is love manifested? In fidelity, in welcoming, and in mercy.

It must not be forgotten however, that this Commandment refers explicitly to marital fidelity and therefore it is fitting that we reflect more deeply on its *spousal* significance. This Scripture passage, this passage from the Letter of Saint Paul is revolutionary! Considering the anthropology of that age, it is saying that a husband must love his wife as Christ loves the Church: it is a revolution! Perhaps in those times it was the most revolutionary thing that had been said about marriage. Always on the path of love. We can ask: to whom is this command of fidelity addressed? Only to spouses? In reality, this command is for everyone; it is a paternal Word of God addressed to every man and woman.

Let us remember that the journey of human maturation is the same path of love that goes from *receiving care* to being able to *offer care*, from *receiving life* to being able to *give life*. Becoming adult men and women means developing the *spousal* and *parental* aptitude which is expressed in life's various situations, such as the ability to take someone else's burden upon oneself, and to love him or her unambiguously. It is therefore the overall ability of a person who accepts reality and is ready to enter into a profound relationship with others.

Who then is the adulterer, the lustful, the unfaithful? It is an immature person who keeps his life to himself and interprets situations on the basis of his own wellbeing and his own gratification. Therefore, in order *to get married*, the wedding ceremony does not suffice! We must make the journey from *I* to *we*, from thinking alone to thinking together, from living alone to living together: it is a good journey; it is a beautiful journey. Once we succeed at decentralizing ourselves, all action is *spousal*: we work, we speak, we decide, we meet others with a welcoming and oblatinal attitude.

In this sense every Christian vocation — we can now expand the perspective further and say that in this sense every Christian vocation — is *spousal*. The *priesthood* is such because it is a call in Christ and in the Church, to serve the community with all the affection, the tangible care and the wisdom that the Lord gives us. The Church does not need people who aspire to the *role* of priests — no, we do not need them, it is better if they stay home —, rather we need men

whose hearts are touched by the Holy Spirit with an unreserved love for the Bride of Christ. The priestly ministry means loving the People of God with all the paternal care, the tenderness and strength of a spouse and a father. Thus *virginity consecrated* in Christ is also lived with fidelity and with joy as a spousal and fruitful relationship of motherhood and fatherhood.

I repeat: every Christian vocation is spousal because it is the fruit of the bond of love in which we are all regenerated, a bond of love with Christ, as we were reminded by the passage from Paul that was read at the beginning. Starting from *his* fidelity, from *his* tenderness, from *his* generosity, we look to marriage and every vocation with faith, and we understand the full meaning of sexuality.

The human creature in his or her inseparable unity to the Spirit and to the body, and in the male and female polarity, is a very good reality which is destined to love and to be loved. The human body is not an instrument of pleasure, but the setting for our call to love, and there is no room for lust or superficiality in authentic love. Men and women deserve more than this!

Thus the Word, “You shall not commit adultery”, despite its negative form, directs us to our original call, that is, to the full and faithful spousal love which Jesus Christ revealed and gave to us (cf. Rom 12:1).

— CHAPTER XIV —

**The Seventh Commandment:  
Rich in Love**

*St Peter's Square  
Wednesday, 7 November 2018*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!*

Continuing the explanation of the Decalogue, today we come to the Seventh Word: “*You shall not steal*”.

In hearing this commandment we think of the theme of theft and of respect for other people’s property. There is no culture in which theft and the abuse of property are legal; human sensibility, in fact, is very sensitive in regard to the defence of property.

But it is worth opening ourselves up to a broader interpretation of this Word, focusing on the theme of the ownership of goods in the light of Christian wisdom.

The Social Doctrine of the Church speaks of the *universal destination of goods*. What does it mean? Let us listen to what the Catechism says: “In the beginning God entrusted the earth and its resources to the common stewardship of mankind to take care of them, master them by labor, and enjoy their fruits. The goods of creation are destined for the whole human race” (n. 2402). Moreover: “The universal destination of goods remains primordial, even if the promotion of the

common good requires respect for the right to private property and its exercise” (n. 2403).<sup>23</sup>

Providence, however, did not create a world ‘of series’; there are differences, different conditions, different cultures, so one can live by providing for one another. The world is rich in resources to ensure the basic necessities for everyone. Yet many live in scandalous indigence and resources, used indiscriminately, are dwindling. But there is only one world! There is only one humanity!<sup>24</sup> Today the world’s wealth is in

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. Encyclical *Laudato Si’*, n. 67: “Each community can take from the bounty of the earth whatever it needs for subsistence, but it also has the duty to protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations. ‘The earth is the Lord’s’ (Ps 24:1); to him belongs ‘the earth with all that is within it’ (Dt 10:14). Thus God rejects every claim to absolute ownership: ‘The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with me’ (Lev 25:23)”.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Paul VI, Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, n. 17: “Each man is also a member of society; hence he belongs to the community of man. It is not just certain individuals but all men who are called to further the development of human society as a whole.... We are the heirs of earlier generations, and we reap benefits from the efforts of our contemporaries; we are under obligation to all men. Therefore we cannot disregard the welfare of those who will come after us to increase the human family. The reality of human solidarity brings us not only benefits but also obligations”.

the hands of the minority, of the few, and poverty, or rather misery and suffering, is in those of the many, of the majority.

If there is hunger on earth it is not for lack of food! Rather, due to market demands it is at times even destroyed, wasted. What is lacking is free and forward-looking entrepreneurship, which ensures proper production in a solidary framework, which ensures equitable distribution. The Catechism also states: “In his use of things man should regard the external goods he legitimately owns not merely as exclusive to himself but common to others also, in the sense that they can benefit others as well as himself” (n. 2404). All wealth, in order to be good, must have a social dimension.

The positive and broad meaning of the commandment “*you shall not steal*” appears in this perspective. “The ownership of any property makes its holder a steward of Providence” (*ibid.*). No one is the absolute owner of goods: he is a steward of goods. Ownership is a *responsibility*: ‘But I am rich in everything...’ — this is a responsibility that you have. And every good subtracted from the logic of God’s Providence is betrayed; it is betrayed in its most profound sense. What I truly own is what I am able to give. This is the measure to evaluate how I am able to manage riches, whether good or bad; this phrase is important: what I truly own is what I am able to give. If I am able to give, I am open, then I am rich not only in what I own, but also in generosity, generosity also as a duty to give wealth, so that all may partake of it. In fact if I cannot give something it is because that thing owns me, has

power over me, and enslaves me. The possession of goods is an opportunity to multiply them creatively and to use them generously, and thereby to grow in charity and freedom.

Christ himself, “though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself” (Phil 2:6-7) and enriched us with his poverty (cf. 2 Cor 8:9).

While humanity takes pains *to have more*, God redeems it by becoming poor: that Crucified Man paid an incalculable ransom for everyone, on the part of God the Father, “rich in mercy” (Eph 2:4; cf. Jas 5:11). What makes us rich is not goods but love. So often we have heard what the People of God say: ‘The devil enters through the pockets’. It starts with a love of money, a hunger for possessions; then comes vanity: ‘Ah, I am rich and brag about it’; and, in the end, pride and arrogance. This is the devil’s way of acting in us. But the entrance is through the pocket.

Dear brothers and sisters, once again Jesus Christ reveals to us the full meaning of Scripture. “*You shall not steal*” means: love with your goods, make use of your means to love as best you can. Then your life becomes good and your property truly becomes a gift. Because life is not the time for possessing but for loving. Thank you.

— CHAPTER XV —

**The Eighth Commandment:  
Living as Children of God**

*St Peter's Square  
Wednesday, 14 November 2018*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!*

In today's catechesis we will address the Eighth Word of the Decalogue: "*You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour*".

This Commandment — the Catechism says — “forbids misrepresenting the truth in our relations with others” (n. 2464). To live with false communication is serious because it impedes relationships and, therefore, impedes love. Where there are lies there is no love; there can be no love. And when we speak about interpersonal communication we do not mean words alone, but also gestures, attitudes, even silence and absence. A person *speaks* with all that he is and does. We are always communicating. We all live by communicating and we are always poised between truth and lies.

But what does it mean to *tell the truth*? Does it mean being sincere? Or precise? In fact, this is not enough, because one can be genuinely mistaken, or one can be precise in the details but not grasp the overall sense. At times we justify ourselves by saying: ‘But I said what I felt!’. Yes, but you have presented your point of view as an absolute. Or: ‘I only told the truth!’. Perhaps, but

you revealed personal or private matters. How much gossip destroys communion by inopportune comments or lack of sensitivity! Indeed, gossip kills, and James the Apostle said this in his Letter. Those who gossip are people who kill: they kill others because the tongue kills as much as a knife. Be careful! Those who gossip are like terrorists because their tongues throw a bomb and then they calmly walk away, but what they say with that bomb destroys the reputation of others. Do not forget: gossiping kills.

So: what is truth? This is the question Pilate asked, just as Jesus, standing before him, fulfilled the eighth Commandment (cf. Jn 18:38). Indeed, the words “you shall not bear false witness against your neighbour” pertain to forensic language. The Gospels culminate in the narrative of Jesus’ Passion, Death and Resurrection; and this is the narrative of a process, of the execution of the sentence and of an unprecedented consequence.

As he is interrogated by Pilate, Jesus says: “For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, *to bear witness to the truth*” (Jn 18:37). And Jesus bears this “witness” through his passion and through his death. The Evangelist Mark recounts that “the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that he thus breathed his last, [and] said: ‘Truly this man was the Son of God!’” (15:39). Yes, because he was consistent. He was consistent: in the way that he dies, Jesus manifests the Father, his merciful and steadfast love.

Truth is fully realized in the very person of Jesus (cf. Jn 14:6), in his *way* of living and of dying, fruit of his relationship with the Father. This existence as children of God. He, the Risen One, gives it to us too, sending the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of truth, who attests to our heart that God is our Father (cf. Rom 8:16).

In every action, man, people, either affirm or deny this truth. From the little everyday situations to the most binding choices. But the logic is always the same: what our parents and grandparents teach us when they tell us not to tell lies.

Let us ask ourselves: to what truths do our — we Christians' — deeds, our words, our choices, attest? Everyone can ask themselves: am I a witness of truth, or am I more or less a liar disguised as *true*? Everyone ask themselves. We Christians are not exceptional men and women. However, we are children of the heavenly Father, who is good and does not disappoint us, and instills in our hearts love for our brothers and sisters. This truth is not expressed so much in speech; it is a way of life, a way of living, and is seen in every single action (cf. Jas 2:18). This man is a *true* man, that woman is a *true* woman: one can see it. But how, if they do not open their mouths. But they behave like *true* men and women. They tell the truth, they act with truth. It is a good way for us to live.

The truth is the marvelous revelation of God, of his Fatherly face; it is his boundless love. This truth corresponds to human reason, but infinitely transcends it, because it is a gift descended to the earth and embodied in Christ crucified and

Risen; it is made visible by those who belong to him and demonstrate his same disposition.

*Not bearing false witness* means living as children of God, who never, ever contradict themselves, never tell lies; living as children of God, letting shine forth in every deed the supreme truth: that God is Father and that we can trust in him. I trust God: this is the great truth. From our trust in God — who is Father and who loves me, loves us — springs *my* truth, being truthful and not a liar.

— CHAPTER XVI —

**The Ninth and Tenth Commandments:  
The Heart of Man**

*St Peter's Square  
Wednesday, 21 November 2018*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!*

Our sessions on the Decalogue lead us today to the last Commandment. We heard it at the opening. These are not only the final words of the text, but much more: they are the fulfilment of the journey through the Decalogue, touching the heart of all that it consigns. In fact, on a closer look, no new content is being added: the indications “*you shall not covet your neighbour’s wife*” and “*you shall not covet your neighbour’s goods*” are at least latent in the Commandments on adultery and theft; so what is the function of these words? Is it a summary? Is it something more?

Let us keep well in mind that the purpose of all the Commandments is to indicate life’s boundaries, the limits beyond which man destroys himself and neighbour, ruining his relationship with God. If you go beyond these, you destroy yourself, you also destroy your relationship with God and your relationship with others. The Commandments point this out. Through this last word the fact is emphasized that all transgressions spring from a common inner root: *evil desires*. All sins are born from an evil desire. All. There, the heart begins to move and one sets

out on that wave and ends up in transgression. But not a formal, legal transgression: a transgression that wounds oneself and others.

In the Gospel Jesus says it explicitly: “from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a man” (Mk 7:21-23).

Thus we understand that the whole itinerary outlined by the Decalogue would have no utility whatsoever if it did not reach this level, *the heart of man*. Where do these awful things come from? The Decalogue is clear and profound in this aspect: this journey’s point of arrival — the last Commandment — is the heart, and if this, if the heart is not liberated, the rest serves little purpose. This is the challenge: to liberate the heart from all these evil and awful things. God’s precepts can be reduced to being no more than the lovely facade of a life that nevertheless continues to be an existence of slaves, not of children. Often, something unsightly and unresolved is hidden behind the pharisaic mask of suffocating propriety.

We must instead allow ourselves to be unmasked by these Commandments on desire, so they may show us our poverty, in order to lead us to a holy humiliation. Each of us can ask ourselves: which awful desires do I most often feel? Envy, greed, gossip? All these things that come to me from inside. We each can ask ourselves

this and it will do us good. Man needs this blessed humiliation: by which he discovers he cannot free himself on his own, which is why he cries out to God in order to be saved. Paul explains it in an unparalleled way, referring precisely to the Commandment *you shall not covet* (Rom 7:7-24).

It is vain to think we can correct ourselves without the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is vain to think we can purify our heart through a tremendous effort of our own will: this is not possible. We must open ourselves to the relationship with God, in truth and in freedom: only in this way can our efforts bear fruit, because the Holy Spirit is there to carry us forward.

The task of Biblical Law is not to delude man that literal obedience leads him to a contrived but unreachable salvation. The Law's task is to lead man to his truth, or to his poverty, which becomes the authentic opening and personal opening to God's mercy, which transforms us and renews us. God is the only one able to renew our heart, provided we open our heart to him: it is the sole condition. He does everything but we must open our heart to him.

The final words of the Decalogue teach everyone to acknowledge that we are *beggars*; they help us to face the turmoil of our heart, in order to stop living selfishly and to become poor in spirit, authentic in the sight of God, allowing ourselves to be redeemed by the Son and to be tempered by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the teacher who guides us: let us allow ourselves

to be helped. We are beggars, let us ask for this grace.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 5:3). Yes, blessed are those who stop deluding themselves into believing that they can save themselves from their own weaknesses without God’s mercy which alone can heal. Only God’s mercy can heal hearts. Blessed are those who recognize their evil desires and who, with a contrite and humbled heart, stand before God and others not as righteous but as sinners. What Peter said to the Lord is beautiful: “Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man”. This is a beautiful prayer: “Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man”.

They are the ones who know how to have compassion, who know how to have mercy for others because they experience it themselves.

— CHAPTER XVII —

**A New Heart – New Desires**

*Paul VI Audience Hall  
Wednesday, 28 November 2018*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!*

In today's catechesis, which concludes the series on the Ten Commandments, we can take as the key theme that of *desires*, which allows us to review the journey we have made and summarize the stages we have completed in reading the text of the Decalogue, always in the light of the full revelation in Christ.

We began with *gratitude* as the basis of the relationship of trust and obedience: God, as we saw, asked for nothing before he had given much more. He invites us to obedience in order to deliver us from the misleading forms of idolatry that have so much power over us. Indeed, seeking self-realization in the idols of this world empties us and enslaves us, while what gives us stature and consistency is the relationship with the One who, in Christ, makes us children by virtue of his fatherhood (cf. Eph 3:14-16).

This entails a process of blessing and liberation, which is true, authentic rest. As the Psalm states: “For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation” (Ps 62[61]:1).

This liberated life embraces our personal history and reconciles us with what, from childhood to

the present, we have experienced, becoming adults and being able to give the proper weight to the realities and the people in our life. By this path we enter a relationship with our neighbour which, springing from the love that God demonstrates in Jesus Christ, is a call to the beauty of *fidelity, generosity and authenticity*.

But to live in this way — that is, in the beauty of fidelity, generosity and authenticity — we need *a new heart*, inhabited by the Holy Spirit (cf. Ez 11:19; 36:26). I wonder: how does this heart ‘transplant’, from an old heart to a new heart, come about? Through the gift of *new desires* (cf. Rom 8:6) that are sown in us by the grace of God, in a particular way, through the Ten Commandments fulfilled by Jesus, as he teaches in the ‘Sermon on the Mount’ (cf. Mt 5:15-48). Indeed, in contemplating the life described in the Decalogue — that is, a grateful, free, authentic, blessed, adult existence, as guardian and lover of a steadfast, generous and sincere life — almost without realizing it we stand before Christ again. The Decalogue is his ‘x-ray’: it is like a photographic negative that lets his face appear — as in the Holy Shroud. And thus the Holy Spirit renders our heart fruitful, placing in it desires that are his gift, the *desires of the Spirit*. To desire according to the Spirit, to desire with the rhythm of the Spirit, to desire with the music of the Spirit.

Looking to Christ we see beauty, goodness, truth. And the Spirit engenders a life that, supporting these desires of his, kindles hope, faith and love in us.

In this way we can better understand why the Lord Jesus did not come to abolish the law but to fulfil it, to develop it, and as the law according to the flesh was a series of prescriptions and prohibitions, according to the Spirit this same law becomes life (cf. Jn 6:63; Eph 2:15), because it is no longer a rule but the very flesh of Christ, who loves us, seeks us, forgives us, consoles us and in his Body recreates the communion with the Father, lost through the disobedience of sin. And thus, the literal negative, the negative expression used in the Commandments — ‘you shall not steal’, ‘you shall not insult’, ‘you shall not kill’ — that ‘not’ is transformed into a positive approach: to love, to make room in my heart for others, all desires that sow positivity. And this is the fullness of the law that Jesus came to bring us.

In Christ, and in him alone, the Decalogue ceases to be a condemnation (cf. Rom 8:1) and becomes the authentic truth of human life, namely, a desire for love — a desire for good, to do good is born here — a desire for joy, for peace, for magnanimity, for benevolence, for goodness, for fidelity, for meekness, self-control. It goes from that ‘no’ to this ‘yes’: the positive attitude of a heart that opens with the power of the Holy Spirit.

This is what seeking Christ in the Decalogue means: to make our heart fruitful so that it may be filled with love and open to God’s work. When men and women comply with the desire to live according to Christ, they are opening the door to salvation which cannot fail to occur because God the Father is generous and, as the

Catechism says, “thirsts that we may thirst for him” (n. 2560).

If evil desires defile mankind (cf. Mt 15:18-20), the Spirit places in our heart his holy desires which are the seeds of new life (cf. 1 Jn 3:9). Indeed, the new life is not a titanic effort to comply with a rule, but rather, the new life is God’s own Spirit that begins to guide us to his fruits, in a happy synergy between our joy in being loved and his joy in loving us. The two joys come together: God’s joy in loving us and our joy in being loved.

This is what the Decalogue is for us Christians: to contemplate Christ in order to open ourselves up to receive his heart, to receive his will, to receive his Holy Spirit.