

# LOOKING THROUGH STAINED GLASS



## A Column by Fr. Tom

### If Your Hand Causes You to Sin... [MT 5:30]

As we continue to move forward through the Ten Commandments, we have arrived at the Seventh Commandment, which is expressed in the Traditional Catechetical Formula simply as, "You shall not steal."

In its simplest interpretation, this Commandment forbids taking someone's goods or property without their consent. According to the *Catechism*, "The Seventh Commandment forbids theft, that is, usurping another's property against the reasonable will of the owner." [CCC 2408] However, the *Catechism* immediately goes on to expand the scope of this Commandment with the next article, "Any form of unjustly taking and keeping the property of others is against the Seventh Commandment: thus, deliberate retention of goods lent or of objects lost; business fraud; paying unjust wages; forcing up prices by taking advantage of the ignorance or hardship of another [are offenses against the Seventh Commandment, as are...] speculation in which one contrives to manipulate the price of goods artificially in order to gain an advantage to the detriment of others; corruption in which one influences the judgment of those who must make decisions according to law; appropriation and use for private purposes of the common goods of an enterprise; work poorly done; tax evasion; forgery of checks and invoices; excessive expenses and waste [and] willfully damaging private or public property [...]. [CCC 2409]

Here are two examples of stealing from another that are specific to the employer-employee relationship. "A just wage is the legitimate fruit of work. To refuse or withhold it can be a grave injustice. In determining fair pay both the needs and the contributions of each person must be taken into account. 'Remuneration for work should guarantee man the opportunity to provide a dignified livelihood for himself and his family on the material, social, cultural and spiritual level, taking into account the role and the productivity of each, the state of the business, and the common good.'" [CCC 2434] Also,

employees can be guilty of stealing from their employer, not just from taking office supplies and the like, but also by stealing time – claiming working hours when one is not working, engaging in idleness and chatter at work, and completing personal tasks at work (including personal calls, web searches and shopping).

The above are relatively easy to recognize as stealing from another, but there are other ways that we might steal from others that are less obvious. For example, according to the saints, we steal from the poor by a lack of charity. "Not to enable the poor to share in our goods is to steal from them and deprive them of life. The goods we possess are not ours, but theirs." [St. John Chrysostom] and "When we attend to the needs of those in want, we give them what is theirs, not ours. More than performing works of mercy, we are paying a debt of justice." [St. Gregory the Great]

According to the *Catechism*, we can even steal from those we've never met by irresponsible use of the resources of this world. "The Seventh Commandment enjoins respect for the integrity of creation. Animals, like plants and inanimate beings, are by nature destined for the common good of past, present, and future humanity. Use of the mineral, vegetable, and animal resources of the universe cannot be divorced from respect for moral imperatives. Man's dominion over inanimate and other living beings granted by the Creator is not absolute; it is limited by concern for the quality of life of his neighbor, including generations to come; it requires a religious respect for the integrity of creation." [CCC 2415] According to this statement, misuse of the world's resources is not only stealing from those who might use these resources better but also from our children and grandchildren.

We grow in holiness by loving our neighbor enough not to take from them what is rightfully theirs.

