

# THE FIFTH AND SIXTH COMMANDMENTS

## BACKGROUND READING



“You shall not kill” and “you shall not commit adultery” are the traditional wording for the Fifth and Sixth Commandments. In His teachings, Christ not only affirmed both of these commandments, He expanded our understanding of them to include the attitude of the heart. For the Fifth Commandment, He said, “You have heard that it was said to your ancestors ‘You shall not kill; and whoever kills will be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you, whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment” (Matthew 5:21-22). And about the Sixth Commandment He said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you, everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:27-28).

### The Fifth Commandment

The Fifth Commandment not only prohibits the deliberate killing of innocent human beings, but also encompasses our duty to acknowledge all of life as a God given gift. We are called to promote the sacred respect for life from the moment of its conception to the natural death of each and every human

being. One of the most fundamental truths our culture denies is that God is the source and master of all life. Many in our culture therefore unwittingly participate in and are victims of sins against the dignity of human life, most notably abortion and euthanasia.

All that we have been studying this year shows that we do not “belong to ourselves.” Our culture assumes that we do, and that we only have ourselves to answer to. But we belong to God. Only He is the author of life. Jeremiah 1:5 says, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you.” Abortion ends the life of a human person before he or she is born, and euthanasia puts to death a handicapped, sick, depressed, or dying person. Both are grave sins and end the lives of human beings that God has formed and only He has the power to end. We must pray that God’s healing mercy will reach those who have, because of difficult circumstance and the blindness of culture, committed these offenses.

It is our duty to care for our life and to cooperate with God’s grace toward our salvation. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, “We are stewards, not owners,

of the life God has entrusted to us. It is not ours to dispose of” (CCC 2280). Because of this, suicide, the taking of one’s own life, is contrary to the moral law. The act of assisting another in ending their life is also an offense against the Fifth Commandment. Serious mental or emotional disturbances can lessen the responsibility of a person who commits suicide. We should not lose hope for the eternal salvation of persons who have committed suicide, but trust in God’s mercy and pray for them.

While the Fifth Commandment forbids the deliberate murder of an innocent person, defending ourselves against an aggressor is our right and our duty. If by defending our own life or the lives of our family, we are forced to kill an aggressor, we are not guilty of murder. The Church also teaches that the death penalty is only permissible when there is no other possible way of protecting the safety of others. This approach is in keeping with the dignity of the human person and allows for the possibility that the individual may experience a conversion of heart.

The Fifth Commandment requires that we show respect not only for the life of human persons but also for their dignity. These duties include:

- › Respect for the souls of others by not committing scandal (an attitude or behavior that leads other to evil).
- › Respect for our health and the health of others.
- › Respect for the human person in all areas of scientific research.
- › Respect for the dead.
- › Safeguarding peace.
- › Avoiding war.

Keeping the Fifth Commandment not only means respecting physical life, but also the life of the soul, and safeguarding the dignity of all human persons.

## The Sixth Commandment

The Sixth Commandment requires us to be pure in the use of our sexuality. In creating man and woman in His image and likeness, God designed them to be a reflection of the intimate, free, and loving communion that is at the heart of the Trinity. Every human person is created with the vocation to love, and to be in communion with one another. Sexual activity outside of married love is an abuse of this gift of our sexuality.

In order to keep the Sixth Commandment, we must cultivate the virtue of chastity. The *Catechism* describes chastity as “the successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of man in his bodily and spiritual being. ...The virtue of chastity therefore involves the integrity of the person” (CCC 2337). Integrity is the properly ordered relationship of our will (the ability to make choices) with our feelings and imagination. Chastity helps us control our passions and imagination instead of letting our passions and imagination control us! Put simply, only when we have gained mastery of our will over our emotions and imagination, are we free to make a gift of ourselves to another. After all, we cannot give what we don’t have.

The chaste and intimate union of spouses in the sexual act of marriage fosters the true gift of self to one another and “enriches the spouses in joy and gratitude. Sexuality is a source of joy and pleasure” (CCC 2362). In Genesis we read that in marriage man and

woman are no longer two separate persons, but they cleave to one another and become one flesh. In being faithful to one another in their marriage covenant before God, the spouses become for the world a reflection of how Christ is faithful to His bride the Church. This is why the Church has always held that a validly contracted marriage between

baptized persons cannot be dissolved under any circumstances. Jesus says in the Gospel of Matthew, “What God has joined together, no human being must separate” (Matthew 19:6). If in our troubled world we suffer from broken relationships, we must give ourselves completely to God who alone can understand and heal the deep woundedness of our hearts.