

An Examination of Conscience (*Scepter*)

The first commandment

I am the Lord thy God; thou shalt not have strange gods before me.

With this commandment God prohibits idolatry, a sin which was very common long ago. Apart from prohibiting sacrifices to idols, however, this commandment reminds us that God wants us to believe in him as the one true God, to believe what he has revealed to us and has passed on to us through the Church. Without faith we cannot please God. God is our Creator and Redeemer and Sanctifier, so we should hope for our own salvation, and we should love God above all things because he is infinitely lovable in himself. Sins against the first commandment are very often sins against faith, hope, and charity.

1. Have I doubted God's existence? Have I denied my faith in thought, word, or deed?
2. Have I sought a deeper understanding of my faith, and have I asked clarification of points I find hard to grasp? Have I deliberately cast doubt on any truth of faith which the Church teaches as having been revealed by God?
3. Did I endanger my faith by joining or attending meetings and activities of organizations contrary to the Church or to Catholic faith (anti-Catholic gatherings, non-Catholic prayer meetings, Freemasonry, cults, and other religions)
4. Have I put myself in danger of losing my faith by what I have read?
5. Have I lost sight of God as a loving Father and despaired of my salvation?
6. On the other hand, have I taken his mercy for granted and sinned by presumption?
7. Have I been diligent in practicing my faith? Do I pray regularly, knowing that by praying I practice the virtues of faith, hope, and love?
8. Have I committed a sin of sacrilege, showing disrespect to God by harming a sacred person, place or thing? Have I received any of the sacraments unworthily? Have I made a bad confession?
9. Am I sorry for these sins and do I embrace the desire to grow in faith, hope, and love of God? Am I willing to make the effort to obtain a more thorough knowledge of the faith? Do I pray for a deeper faith: "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief" (Mk 9: 21)?

The second commandment

Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.

It is only natural that we should honor the holy Name of God because of who he is. The second commandment prohibits blasphemy and false oaths. It doesn't prohibit "four lettered" words: they are simply vulgar and in bad taste, though of course they are sometimes an expression of anger or bad temper, and as such would come under the fifth

commandment. It can be more or less sinful to use God's name irreverently, as an exclamation of annoyance or surprise; here we are talking about profanities which we should avoid. However, it would be a mortal sin to blaspheme in the strict sense of the word, to swear falsely, or to take a false oath.

1. Have I shown a lack of reverence to God's name in conversation or exclamations? Am I willing to make the effort to get rid of any bad habits in this regard?
2. Have I sworn oaths lightly, calling God to witness the truth of what I say?
3. Have I spoken falsely under oath, for example in a court of law?
4. Have I fulfilled promises made under oath?
5. Have I blasphemed? Did I cause scandal?

The third commandment

Keep holy the Sabbath day.

During the time of the Old testament God commanded the people of Israel to set aside the Sabbath day for worship. In the New Testament the Church, with the authority Jesus Christ gave it, has told us how to do this: by attending Mass, which is the supreme act of adoration. It is very good for us to come together on Sundays, as God's people, to give God this public worship together, to hear God's word and to receive the Blessed Eucharist. The church also stipulates additional ways in which we should worship God.

1. Did I miss Mass on Sundays or on holy days of obligation? Was I careless about arriving on time? Did I do my best to pay attention?
2. Did I cause others to miss Mass, or was I a source of distraction for them?
3. Did I always observe the required one hour fast from any food and drink (except water) before receiving Holy Communion?
4. Did I fulfill my Easter duty of receiving Holy Communion worthily, going to confession beforehand if necessary?
5. Did I fulfill the penance the priest gave me in my last confession?
6. Have I performed some act of penance on Fridays as laid down by the bishops of this country? Do I do so with the right intention?
7. In the home, as a parent, do I try to mark the feast days of the Church with a little celebration?

The fourth commandment

Honor thy father and thy mother.

What makes for a happy family? Undoubtedly it is important to ensure proper housing, recreational facilities, and all those services which people can almost take for granted in many parts of the world, although there are still many who are very deprived. With all that, and even without, family life will be all that it can and should be if both parents and

children strive to live by, and love the fourth commandment and try to reproduce the atmosphere of the Holy Family in their home.

The fourth commandment also obliges us to obey civil authority lawfully exercised in accordance with God's law.

For children:

1. Have I been disobedient or disrespectful toward my parents?
2. Have I neglected to help my parents in their needs?
3. Did I treat my parents with little affection or respect?
4. Do I feel hurt and react proudly when I am corrected by them?
5. Have I been rude, sulky, uncooperative, or incommunicative with my parents?
6. Do I do my house chores?
7. Do I quarrel with my brothers and sisters?
8. Do I take part in family prayer?

For parents:

1. Do I do everything possible to look after the spiritual and material well-being and formation of my children? Do I try to ensure they are assimilating their education in the faith?
2. Do I make it easy for my children, especially the older ones, to obey? Without abdicating my responsibility and authority as a parent, do I try to educate them in the use of freedom, loosening the "apron strings" gradually?
3. Do I put time and effort into winning the friendship and trust of my children so as to be able to give them effective orientation in life?
4. If one of my children were to receive a divine vocation to God's service would I welcome it and encourage it?
5. Do I avoid taking it out on my children when I am tired or in bad humor?
6. Do I obey lawful authority, civil and ecclesiastical? Do I teach my children to do likewise?
7. Do I neglect to watch over my children: the companions they have, the books and magazines they read, the movies and TV shows they watch?

The fifth commandment

Thou shalt not kill.

Violence, death, destruction, drug addiction, suicide: these words appear so often in our daily newspapers--a sad and constant reporting of man's inhumanity to man, and a reminder of how important it is for individuals and society to respect and defend the right to life. The fifth commandment expresses this right to life. The fifth commandment expresses this and also prohibits inflicting injury on oneself or others.

1. Have I been physically violent towards others? Have I injured anyone, except in the case of legitimate self-defense?
2. Do I easily get angry or lose my temper? Do I try to avoid using offensive or bad language?

3. Have I put other people's lives or my own in danger by driving recklessly or under the influence of alcohol?
4. Have I taken drugs, hard or soft? Have I encouraged others to do so?
5. Have I taken part in, consented to, or been in any way responsible for and abortion?
6. Do I eat or drink in excess, realizing that such excess is damaging for my spiritual life and also harmful to my health?
7. Do I allow myself to be dominated by the passions of anger, hatred, envy, jealousy, or desire for revenge? Do I feed my anger by nursing grievances? Am I willing to forgive real or imaginary offenses?
8. Was I an occasion for others to sin by my conversation, way of dressing, invitation to a particular show, lending harmful books or magazines, etc.? Did I try to repair the scandal I may have caused?
9. Did I neglect my health? Did I ever attempt to take my life?
10. Do I make an effort to contribute toward an improvement of the quality of life of those who suffer hardship or neglect?

The sixth commandment

Thou shalt not commit adultery.

The fifth commandment reminds us that human life is sacred. The sixth goes further: It tells us that the channels through which human life comes are also sacred. Sex is not a plaything but rather a means whereby God brings men and women together to form a lifelong partnership in marriage and involves them in his work of creation (procreation). As an encouragement and as a reward to the self-giving of husband and wife, God has made that union and cooperation pleasurable and fulfilling. When people treat their sexuality in a sacred way, respecting God's law, whether married or single (and it does make a difference), they are happier, enjoy life, are more generous and thoughtful.

Those who offend against the sixth commandment, against the Christian virtues of modesty, purity, and marital fidelity, inevitably treat sex and partners merely as sources of pleasure; they become increasingly selfish and less human, leaving less and less room for love, human or supernatural. We should realize that it is both possible and rewarding to live pure lives without being prudish.

1. Have I committed the sin of adultery (sexual intercourse when one or both of the participants is married to someone else) or fornication (sexual intercourse outside marriage)?
2. In courtship do I treat my companion with respect and affection? Do I try to deepen the relationship in accordance with God's Law, not contrary to it?
3. Do I engage in act that involve or lead to passion such as "petting," "necking," passionate kisses, and prolonged embraces?
4. Did I commit impure acts? By myself through the practice of self-abuse (masturbation) which is an intrinsically and gravely disordered action (CCC 2352)? With someone else? How many times? With people of the same or

5. opposite sex? Was there any circumstance of relationship, etc., that could make it more serious? Did those actions lead to conception? Did I do anything to prevent it? After the new life had begun?
5. Do I put myself in danger of sinning against the sixth commandment by the company I keep, by the books and magazines I read, by the places I go to, by the films I watch?
6. Did I engage in impure conversations? Did I start them? Did I look at immodest pictures, or cast immodest looks upon myself or others?
7. Have I made use of artificial contraception? Am I aware of the Church's teaching on responsible parenthood (as explained, for example, in *Humane Vitae and other papal documents*)?
8. Do I strive to grow in love and affection towards my spouse? Do I make a point of remembering and celebrating birthdays and anniversaries? Do I try to keep my love young?
9. When disagreements occur with my spouse, am I quick to forgive and forget? Am I a good listener? Do I try to be a source of cheerfulness and optimism in the home, especially when faced with family or financial difficulties?

The seventh commandment

Thou shalt not steal

At long last, you might think, a straightforward commandment. It is, if we are scrupulously honest, but if we are even a little dishonest, it can become complicated with if's and but's. Besides, the seventh commandment commands us to be just, to give everyone his or her due, and if we unjustly deprive others of their property, we are bound to restitution.

It stands to reason that if we commit a sin against justice, then before it is forgiven we must have the firm intention of making restitution as quickly as possible. Since this can be complicated at times, we should ask the priest in confession for advice and clarification as to what we should do.

A lot of human suffering would be eliminated, a lot of hungry people would be fed, a lot of crime would be eliminated if we all practiced the virtue of justice scrupulously and crowned it with charity.

1. Have I stolen small or large sums of money, or goods of small or great value? Am I willing to give them back to their rightful owner?
2. Have I bought, or otherwise received, items which I know or suspect to be stolen?
3. Am I extravagant in my expenses to the point of incurring debts I know I may be unable to repay? Am I living beyond my means?
4. Did I deliberately overcharge for something I was selling?
5. Have I unlawfully broken a contract or business agreement to the detriment of another person?
6. Have I obtained money or goods by deceit or fraud?
7. Have I paid my taxes? Did I make truthful tax-returns?

8. Have I paid a just wage to those who work for me? Have I withheld wages, or obligatory payments to social security or insurance schemes on behalf of those who work for me?
9. Do I always do an honest day's work? Do I waste time or materials at work, or cause others to do so?
10. Am I generous in giving alms? Do I support needy and worthwhile causes?

The eighth commandment

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

It's not always easy to put a price on some items: how much is that mountain or that island worth? If I steal a sum of money from someone he will be at a loss but if he is still working, or covered by insurance, he will be able to get more money. But if I take away someone's good name through calumny, or detraction, or innuendo, her reputation may be damaged for life.

We all have a right to our good name. It is a sin, and often a grave sin, for someone to damage our good name. Idle words and, of course, malicious words can do a lot of damage to individuals, families, and society.

The eighth commandment is a very beautiful one because it commands us to make proper use of a faculty which we have and animals don't--the possibility of expressing our thought orally. God wants us to be sincere--to maintain a consistency between what we think and what we say.

1. Have I taken away someone's good name by calumny (falsely accusing him of something evil) or detraction (unnecessarily revealing a defect or evil action)?
2. Have I made rash judgments about people's actions or motives?
3. Have I insulted anyone? Have I hurt other people's feelings? If so, have I apologized?
4. Have I broken trust by revealing a secret? In particular, have I revealed or leaked confidential information of a professional nature?
5. Have I indulged in gossip? Have I encouraged others to gossip?
6. Have I told lies, to avoid embarrassment, to get out of awkward situations, to look good, etc.?
7. Am I willing to make a very sensible resolution: to tell the truth always and not to say anything about other people if it is not to their credit, except for very grave reasons?

Ninth and tenth commandments

Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife.

Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's goods.

The last two commandments warn us off from such thoughts or desires as would lead us to sin against the sixth and seventh commandments respectively. In the Sermon on the

Mount our Lord refers indirectly to these commandments when he says: "Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God," "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5: 8,3). He also indicates the malice of internal sins against the virtue of chastity: "But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Mt 5: 28).

When dealing with these internal sins, it's important for us to distinguish between appetite and consenting to an illicit thought or desire. I may feel an attraction to a person or thing in an illicit fashion, but my rejection of the temptation will be meritorious in God's eyes.

The materialistic attitudes of our times must surely spring from a scant regard for the tenth commandment, and the disregard for the dignity of the human person, which we often bemoan, has a lot to do with both of these commandments.

1. Have I deliberately indulged in lustful thoughts or desires? Did I consent to impure feelings? Do I realize that temptation is one thing, but to give in is another? Do I try to control my imagination?
2. Do I avoid idleness, since it is often in the idle moment that temptation comes?
3. Do I practice Christian detachment by not craving after the most recent fads or developments? Do I complain when I lack comforts? Is my mood excessively dependent on what I have or don't have?
4. Am I willing to give time and money generously, within my means, to alleviate the needs of others?
5. Do I help others without making a fuss?
6. Do I make a positive effort to rejoice at the good fortune of others? Do I suppress any tendency to be jealous of other people's good qualities, good luck, or possessions?