

Ten Commandments

Ten Exceptions

3rd Sunday of Lent – Year B

Exodus 20:1-17^{**}
Psalms 19:8, 9, 10, 11

1 Corinthians 1:22-25
John 2:13-25

In speaking to Catholics with children or grandchildren in Catholic schools or CCD, I have noticed a common standard used to judge the quality of religious education – are the children learning the Ten Commandments? I have also noticed a similar standard for judging the moral life – is one living the Ten Commandments?

The Ten Commandments is a watershed in the development of Law. They have stood the test of time, ranking along side other law codes, such as that of Hammurabi, as legal icons from which other codes have developed, and which has placed Moses as one of the great lawgivers of history. The fact that these commandments are inspired by God makes them all the more important to people of faith; defining the very will of God vis-à-vis how we are to live our lives and relate both to the divine and to one another.

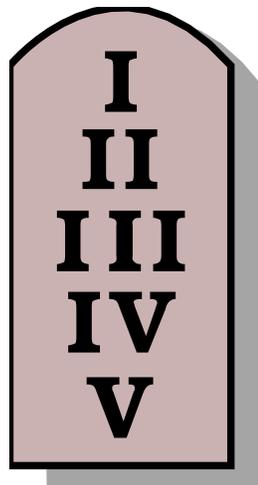
In recent years the impact of the Ten Commandments has been acknowledged, usually negatively, by those who see them merely as religious precepts. Because of

their connection to Judeo-Christianity, some seek to expel them from the public realm. Recent court cases have sought to ban them from public display under the auspices of separation of Church and State, conveniently ignoring their historic value to the development of Law. Still others seek to do away with them as old-fashioned products of ancient societies, not conducive to modern enlightened thinking.

These attempts to eliminate the Ten Commandments from public displays have gained a great deal of publicity as people of faith strive to keep them prominent in the mindset of modern society. Nonetheless, there are still other ways in which these commandments have been downplayed, excluded and otherwise pushed out of

the mainstream. While we surely hope that they remain a part of our socio-political and religious culture as Church and as a nation, they have been given more or less prominence because of the way we integrate them into our lives.

A frequent guide given by many priests and spiritual directors for an effective



The Ten Commandments

examination of conscience prior to going to confession is to reflect on how well we live the Ten Commandments. As we begin this season of Lent, a season in which we “turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel,” a season of rising above our sinfulness, recognizing our shortcomings and growing in the manner in which we embrace and live the Gospel given to us by Christ, the Ten Commandments serve as a fitting examination of conscience.

In looking at ourselves, do we make these Ten Commandments a continued presence in our world by the way we follow them; or do we push them aside, knowingly or unknowingly, by the manner in which we make exceptions to where and how they apply in our lives, our outlook, and our attitudes toward our faith, our God and one another? Below are some possible exceptions to the Ten Commandments that are commonly seen. How many of them apply to us? Can we perhaps think of other “exceptions” to the Ten Commandments?

1. **You shall have no other God before me** (*except the god of secular-progressive atheistic political correctness*).
You shall not make unto me a graven image (*but we can make images, monuments and buildings to ourselves for a large enough donation*).
2. **You shall not take the name of the Lord, your God, in vain** (*unless needed to for emphasis when angry, making a point, or making a movie*)
3. **You shall keep holy the Lord’s Day** (*unless you have something “more important” to do such as Little League or NFL, or you find yourself “too busy” to take a day of rest.*)
4. **Honor your Father and your Mother** (*unless you are a teenager who wants an abortion; or unless the faith they tried to raise you in is “old fashioned”*).

5. **You shall not kill** (*unless the government says it is a woman’s “right”, or medical “professionals” have determined one is “too old” or “too sick” to be kept alive*).
6. **You shall not commit adultery** (*unless “God made you that way, ” you are doing it for love; and you are using the right “protection”*).
7. **You shall not steal** (*unless you are taking from the “industrious” and giving to the “lackadaisical”*).
8. **You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor** (*except for expedient exaggeration in the context of gossip, politics or the press.*)
9. **You shall not covet your neighbor’s spouse** (*until he or she gets divorced*).
10. **You shall not covet your neighbor’s goods** (*unless it is a current trend, or your children are doing the coveting, in which case, get them what they want*).

When all is said and done, regardless of the efforts of those who seek to push them out of the mainstream, the Ten Commandments continue to remain with us; the laws written on our universal consciousness by the inspiration of God who calls us to live by His standards, whereby we enter more deeply into the vibrant and life-giving relationship with our God who commands us; a relationship that will inevitably be reflected in the manner in which we love and treat one another. As we progress through Lent, let us be renewed in this basic code of law; simple and uncomplicated in its presentation, audacious in its straightforwardness, dynamic in its scope, and revolutionary in its call to “turn away from sin, and be faithful to the Gospel.”

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