

16. The Love and Service of God

When God revealed himself to man over the centuries he did not do so merely to give us information about himself. He did it in order to set up a real living relationship between himself and us. It was his way of **inviting** us to be his friends. The way in which we respond to that invitation is reflected in the way we behave. In other words our behaviour is our **response** to God's loving **invitation**.

From the very beginning God invited man to a life of intimacy with him. In spite of man's initial failure to respond to that invitation, (i.e. by original sin) God continued to pursue the relationship and to repeat the invitation down through the history of the people of Israel. Finally, he made that invitation still more explicit by sending his own Son, Jesus Christ, to us.

The agreements, or covenants, which God made with his Chosen People at various times, e.g. with Noah, with Abraham, and with Moses, were successive stages of the establishing of that relationship. They all involved God's giving of himself to man, and man's loving response in the gift of himself and his behaviour to God. Their recurring theme in God's words was: "**I will be your God, and you will be my people**".

But how exactly does God want us to respond to the invitation to love him? Until Jesus himself came into the world the Ten Commandments as given to Moses were the most specific expression of the response demanded of mankind by God. They were the gift of God's love to man; the guidance that weak man needed; bonds of love uniting the Creator to his people.

When Jesus came he made it clear that he was not destroying the Ten Commandments, rather he was insisting that they be observed more fully and more perfectly.

"Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them". (Matt. 5, 17).

The Commandments as given to Moses referred to external actions. Jesus showed that external actions alone were not enough, that it was not enough merely to avoid murder or adultery; people must check anger too, and quarrelling and fighting and hatred of others and bitter thoughts, and desires for unlawful sexual gratifications etc. As we study the Ten Commandments individually in this lesson and the next we will see this more clearly.

All the Commandments except the third (in so far as it nominated a specific day for public worship) are an expression of the natural law, i.e. the law which

follows naturally from the fact that we are intelligent human beings. Because of original sin the natural law is not always clear to man. God wished it to be quite clear to his people, so he gave them the Commandments. Jesus explained and taught the same basic law of behaviour more fully. He brought to completion the *invitation --- response* relationship of love between God and man. He based his explanation not only on the Ten Commandments but also on what we call "the Great Commandment".

The Great Commandment

St. Matthew in his twenty-second chapter tells how a young lawyer asked Jesus: "Teacher, which is the great commandment of the Law?" Jesus replied:

"You shall love the lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets" (Matt. 22, 36-40).

The "law and the prophets" meant all the writings of the Old Testament. Jesus is saying that the whole of Religion is based on these two commandments. In this lesson we will consider the first, the love and service of God. In the next lesson we will consider the love and service of our neighbour.

It is easy to say "I love," but not easy to prove it. Love is proved by deeds. Deeds speak louder than words. Man demonstrates his love of God by adoring him in public worship, by honouring his name, and by honouring the Lord's Day.

Adoration

The first and most important duty of man is to adore God. This means to affirm that he is the Supreme Spirit, who alone exists of himself, who is everywhere and all-powerful, who is all goodness, beauty and truth, who made all things, and upon whom all things depend for their existence. It does not mean merely to think this to oneself, but rather to profess it to God, saying to him, either in the mind or with the spoken word, "I adore you."

Adoration involves the exercise of the virtues of faith, hope and charity. *Faith* is the virtue which enables a man to accept Jesus Christ, God-made-man, as Lord and Saviour, and believe all that he taught, just because it was he who taught it. *Hope* is the virtue which enables a man to put his trust in Christ and be confident that he will receive all the help necessary to live a good life and come finally to everlasting happiness in heaven. *Charity* is the virtue which enables a man to love God above all, and love his neighbour for God's sake. These three virtues must go together. One without the others is of no avail. But the greatest of them is charity.

The chief way of adoring God and exercising these three virtues is in the liturgy of the Church.

The Liturgy

The liturgy is the action in which the assembled people of God adore him together.

Man must adore in private, with unspoken and spoken words, namely, in prayer. But no man is made to live alone. He is a member of god's people and must adore with the community. Also he is a body as well as a spirit, and must adore with his whole being. Therefore public actions done by the community of the people are necessary.

Throughout all its history, before and after the coming of Christ, the people of God has assembled about priests to hear the Words, recite prayers, sing hymns and perform religious actions, but above all to offer sacrifice.

The Mass is the Centre of the Liturgy

The liturgy of the religion of Jesus Christ centres on the Mass the sacrifice of the body and blood of Jesus Christ. At the Last Supper he changed bread and wine into his body and blood in order to give his Church a way of joining in the offering of the sacrifice of his life to his Father. He told the apostles to do what he had done. The first Christians gathered about the apostles and the priests they had ordained to celebrate the Eucharist. Buildings called churches were built to shelter the assembled community.

The one who takes the principal part in the liturgy is the priest who, dressed in the official sacred vestments of the Church, represents God and the people. But the people are not merely witnesses or spectators. They take part in the action and express their unity of purpose by praying, singing, standing, kneeling, sitting and even remaining silent together.

The noblest action of which man is capable is to join with Christ and his people in offering the sacrifice of the Mass and be united to him and each other in Holy Communion. Throughout the centuries beautiful ceremonies have been devised by the Church to help the people express their adoration. The prayers and some of the readings from the Scriptures chosen for public reading on the Sundays and Holy Days of the year put before the people the events of Christ's life, death and resurrection and help them to live those events in spirit and imitate their Master in their daily lives.

Liturgical Prayer

Prayer is the raising of the mind and heart to God. The Church urges her children to do this all the time. The Mass is the Church's greatest official prayer. The *Divine Office* (also called *The Prayer of the Church*) is another very beautiful official prayer. It is a collection of psalms, hymns, prayers and Scripture readings arranged to be said at various times during the day, Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, Night Prayer, etc. Priests say it every day. A growing number of lay people also make it their regular prayer book. It is particularly suitable for daily community prayer.

All, whether monks, priests, nuns or layfolk, must practise private prayer. God is not a far-off, great and awesome power outside the universe. He is everywhere, in all places and things, and keeps them in being. "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17, 28). The Holy Spirit dwells in every Christian. Christ said: "He dwells with you, and will be in you" (John 14, 17). St. Paul said: "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?" (1 Cor. 3,16).

Man can talk in his heart to God, even without forming words. Prayer is not necessarily the reciting of set forms of words, but is the raising up of the mind and heart to God, in adoration, love, thanksgiving, petition and sorrow. A man can pray at all times, and all should pray frequently. St. Paul says: "Pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thess. 5, 17-18).

Mary and the Saints

Only the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity are to be adored. "To God alone the glory." When Jesus was tempted by Satan, he drove him away, saying: "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve" (Matt. 4, 10). However, one of the ways of worshipping God is to honour the men and women whom he has particularly blessed, and who have grown holy in his service. These are the saints.

The greatest of the saints is the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the Church, imitating Jesus, pays special honour to her.

There have been many men and women in all periods of history who have lived heroic lives in the service of Christ and his Church. The Church has "canonized" many of them, that is, declared them to be in heaven and worthy of honour and imitation. The Blessed Virgin Mary, the angels and the saints are honoured by the Church because they reflect the holiness of Christ. In honouring them the Church honours God. Since they are so holy and so near to God, their

prayers are powerful. Hence the Church in her liturgy unceasingly says to them: "Pray for us."

The Angels

The Church has always believed in the existence of Angels. They continually adore, praise and serve God. They sometimes act as messengers between God and man. They are a higher form of being than men, vastly superior to man both in intelligence and knowledge. They are pure spirits without material bodies, but sometimes God permits them to assume bodily form when they act as messengers to man. Our own unaided mind could not tell us anything about angels, but we know about them both from God's revelations to man before the time of Christ, and from Christ's own teachings.

Here are some references to the angels from the New Testament: An angel announced the birth of John the Baptist, (Luke 1, 5-25). St. Joseph was told by an angel about the coming birth of Jesus (Matt. 1, 18-25). Already an angel --- Gabriel --- had requested Mary's consent to be the Mother of God (Luke 1, 26-38). Many angels sang at the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem (Luke 2, 8-14).

During his public life, Jesus referred to the angels a number of times. At the start of his public life he said to Nathanael, "Truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man". (John 1, 51).

Once when speaking to a big crowd, he said: "But he who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God" (Luke 12, 9). At another public address he said: "The Son of man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evil doers, and throw them into the furnace of fire; there men will weep and gnash their teeth" (Matt. 13, 41-42). Talking about the importance of repenting of sin he said: "there will be joy among the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15, 10).

When the apostles were showing signs of ambition for power Jesus took a little child, set him in the middle of them and told them to become like him. Then he added: "See that you do not despise one of these little ones: for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 18, 10). Man can look forward to seeing angels in bodily appearance at the end of the world. Talking about the final resurrection of all men from the dead Jesus said: "And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds" (Matt. 24, 31).

During his agony in the garden before his death Jesus was comforted by an angel: "And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him"

(Luke 22, 43). When Peter drew his sword to defend Jesus in the same garden, Jesus said: "Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matt. 26, 53).

All four evangelists tell us that the Resurrection of Jesus an angel came down from heaven and rolled back the stone which enclosed the tomb. Matthew, Mark and Luke give the additional information that an angel actually announced the Resurrection to the holy women who came to the tomb intending to anoint the body with sweet spices. When Jesus ascended into heaven forty days later two angels in white stood by the disciples and said: "Why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven" (Acts 1, 11)

In our modern world of space exploration, when so many people show such curiosity as to whether there might be life on other planets, it seems a pity that we do not think more often about the angels. In them we have legions of powerful, intelligent, friendly beings who know and love the same God we try to know and to love. They are the most excellent beings in God's creation. We can in all confidence ask them to pray for us, just as we ask the prayers of our good friends here on earth. We are destined to share the same eternity with them in heaven.

These mysterious beings are fully involved in the history of our salvation in Christ. Everything that is said about them proclaims the happy truth of God's love and concern for us. This is indicated even by a few names of angels that have been revealed to us. "Gabriel" means God's strength; "Raphael" means God's healing; "Michael" means Who is with God. All of this gives us a glimpse of the connection between the various degrees of creation.

In our public worship at Mass we say to our Father in heaven:

**"With all the choirs of angels in heaven
We proclaim your glory
And join in their unending hymn of praise:
Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
Heaven and earth are full of your glory".**

Statues

Moses sternly forbade the Israelites to make images of birds, animals and fishes, in order to adore them as gods. "You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them

or serve them" (Ex. 20, 4-5). The operative words here are the last. It is idolatry to bow down and serve idols as if they were gods.

Catholics venerate images of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the saints, but they do not adore them as gods. Sometimes they pray before them or carry them in processions. The images remind them of the person they represent and so help them to reverence and honour those persons for their holiness. Catholics know that all holiness comes from God. In honouring the saints they honour him.

It is an instinct in man to cherish photographs and images of loved ones, and to erect statues to men worthy of public honour because of their service to the community. Catholics do the same for the great Christian heroes, the saints, and ask for the help of their prayers.

God' Name

The name of God is holy and must be treated with great respect. Moses told the Israelites that God's name was, in Hebrew, Yahweh. Out of reverence, they never wrote that name, but substituted for it Adonai, meaning Master. Catholics have great reverence for the name of Jesus, called the Holy Name. The Apostles performed miracles and baptized "In the Name of Jesus." St. Paul, in the second chapter of his letter to the Philippians, says it is "name which is above every name," and that, "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth" (Phil. 2, 9-10).

The name of God and his divine Son should only be used in prayer, pious conversation, or in calling on God to witness to the truth on solemn occasions, as in a court of Law.

The Lord's Day

The first chapter of the Book of Genesis arranged the account of the creation of heaven and earth into six days, in order to bring out this lesson: "So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all his work which he had done in creation" (Gen. 2, 3).

This was to teach the Israelites that the seventh day, which they called the Sabbath, was to be a day of rest from all work, in order that the people might have time and opportunity for worship, prayer and meditation on the Word of God. They had rules about what could and could not be done on that day. The Scribes and Pharisees of Christ's day enforced many additional and unreasonable rules, such as, that it was forbidden on the Sabbath to cure the sick, take a walk or pluck a few ears of corn in passing through the fields. Jesus made it clear that these laws were not to apply to Christians.

The Sunday

The Apostles, with the authority of Christ, made the first day of the week, rather than the seventh, the Lord's Day. It is now called the Sunday. It was on Sunday that Christ rose from the dead and the Holy Spirit came down upon the Apostles, and it was on "the first day of the week" that all the faithful gathered for the Eucharist. In keeping the first rather than the seventh day holy the Apostles wished to make it clear that the laws of the Christian Church concerning the Lord's Day were not the same as those of the Jewish Church.

Sunday is a day of rest from daily work for Christians in order that they may have an opportunity of offering public worship to God and of thinking about God's truths and their eternal destiny: also that they might have opportunity for rest and recreation in the company of their family and loved ones. All honest forms of recreation, whether physical or mental, are good on Sunday, so long as they do not prevent a man from publicly worshipping God and thinking about the truths of his religion.

There are other days, such as Christmas Day, New Year's Day, Ascension Thursday, the Assumption of Our Lady, and All Saints' Day, which are called holy-days. Catholics are obliged to attend Mass and rest from their daily work on these days, in so far as this possible.

Self-Denial

Another way in which we show our genuine desire to put God first in our lives is by controlling our human appetites. Our bodies must be trained to obey our intellects and minds. We must have the will power to say "no" to ourselves.

Self-denial is essential to the living of a good Christian life. Jesus said:
"If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9, 23).

These are very strong words: perhaps a little frightening too, because none of us likes giving up things or denying ourselves. It is a lot easier to lie on in bed on Sunday morning than to get up and go to our local church and join with others in worshipping God. But we know that our response of love to God demands that we do it. This means self-denial; it means making personal sacrifices for the we love.

There are times in all our lives when we find it much easier to do what is wrong than to do what is right; our body is pulling towards sin, and our mind and will must command the body to obey. Only those who have formed the habit of little acts of self-denial will have the will power to do the right thing at such times.

We are familiar with the way an athlete trains for a race so that when the big day comes and his exhausted body is crying out to be allowed to give up the race and lie down, his spirit will be strong enough to compel his body to continue on to the end. So by training our body to go from time to time without certain perfectly good things, we ensure that the soul's commands will be obeyed when the body is pulling towards some sinful pleasure.

We practise self-denial for another reason also --- to atone for sin. By every sin we take some satisfaction to which we have no right. By self-denial we give up some legitimate satisfaction and in union with Jesus Christ make up in our own limited way for the unlawful pleasures that we have taken. Moreover, since we are all one body in Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 12), our self-denial can help to atone for the sins of others and obtain grace and help from God both for the living and the dead.

Self-denial and suffering willingly borne are ways in which we follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, Our Lord, and share his sufferings. St. Paul puts it this way:

"I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church".
(Col. 1, 24).

The Church keeps the importance of self-denial before us by asking us to perform some substantial act of self-denial every Friday in memory of Christ's sufferings and death for us. In Australia it is specified that during the Fridays of Lent this should take the form of abstinence from meat. During Lent also the Church asks us to make a special effort to deny ourselves in other matters, particularly by helping to relieve the needs of the poor and hungry throughout the world. She specifies that we should fast at least to the extent of limiting the amount of food we eat on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.

Jesus himself suffered for us. We, by suffering and self-denial can, in union with him, help one another. Suffering is a mystery, but has an essential role to play in every life as God showed us when he suffered himself on the cross.

Many a Catholic dying in agony will repeat over and over again: "All for Thee, O Jesus", knowing that in saying this he unites his sufferings to the sufferings of Christ on the cross.

The Ten Commandments

In the nineteenth chapter of the Book of Exodus it is recorded how Moses, about three months after leaving the land of Egypt with the Israelites, led them to Mt.

Sinai in the desert. There they had a deep religious experience and pledged themselves in a covenant to serve and adore the one true God and him alone. Under God's inspiration Moses drew up a summary of God's Law in ten categories. This is called the Ten Commandments.

These are the basic laws for right living which are natural to all men. God has given man a conscience which is the power to make practical judgments on what is good and what is bad behaviour in his relationship with God and his fellow men. This power of judgment needs training and development. Some, through lack of training or off-repeated sins, have clouded or dulled their consciences, so that they are not always able to distinguish clearly between right and wrong. The Ten Commandments provide a guide to man's conscience. The following are the first three Commandments, concerned with the love and service of God, as given in the twentieth chapter of the Book of Exodus:

"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them . . . You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labour, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God" (Ex. 20, 1-11).

Christ through his Church has given Christians clear indications as to how one sins against these commandments. The following are the chief sins against the first three commandments.

Idolatry

Idolatry means to give to a thing or person worship due to God alone. The Israelites were much tempted to this sin, because they lived among pagans who worshipped idols of birds, beasts and fish. There are people in pagan land today who worship idols, but this is not common in Christian lands. However, there are other ways, apart from idolatry, of giving to creatures honour due to God alone, and they are all sinful.

Some people today put the search for money or possessions or pleasure before their duties to God.

This is a form of idolatry; it is allowing these material things to become our God. "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness." (Matt. 6, 33). There is no greater form of self-deception than to tell ourselves we are too busy making a living to

find time to worship God. "For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life." (Mark 8, 36).

All forms of *Witchcraft, Black Magic* and *Superstition* are contrary to the true worship of God. In their most sinful form these practices are an attempt to use evil spirits as a means of penetrating the mysteries of life, and of peering into and influencing man's future destiny. More often they stem from a decline in true religion rather than deliberate attempt to use the power of evil spirits.

The lack of adequate knowledge of God and prayer leaves a vacuum which people try to fill by the use of horoscopes, amulets, lucky charms, magical signs, séances and such like. Thus they attribute to created things (e.g. the stars) a power over man's actions and a knowledge of his destiny, which can belong only to the Creator. Instead of turning whole-heartedly to God in prayer, with loving trust in his Providence, these people are attempting, even though it may be only half-heartedly, to use created things as a substitute for God.

Satan

Satan is a mighty spirit who rebelled against God. There was some mysterious battle in Heaven and God cast him out and those spirits who joined in his rebellion. In the twelfth chapter of his Revelation St. John writes: "Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they were defeated and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to earth, and his angels were thrown down with him" (Rev. 12, 7-9). St. Peter, in his second letter, says: "god did not spare the angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of nether gloom" (2 Pet. 2, 4). In his first letter he warns: "Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Pet. 5, 8). St. Paul, in the sixth chapter of his letter to the Ephesians, tells them: "Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Eph. 6, 11).

There is then a Power of Evil which seeks to drag men down to hell. The third chapter of the Book of Genesis, using the image of a serpent for the Devil, tells how he led men to rebel against God. That same powerful and evil spirit continues to lead men to do evil and join with him in fighting all that is good.

Profaning God's Name

The following ways of profaning God's name are sinful: *Blasphemy*, which is insulting God by word or action; *Sacrilege*, which is disrespect to a sacred

person, place or thing; *Perjury*, which is calling God to witness to a lie. It is a sin to break a *Vow*, which is a solemn promise made to God.

Profaning the Lord's Day

Catholics are bound, under pain of serious sin, to go to Mass on all Sundays and Holy Days, unless prevented by important and unavoidable duty, sickness or other grave inconvenience. Catholics should not undertake prolonged physical work on Sundays, unless the work is essential for the good of the family or the community in general.

It is a sin for Catholic to refuse to obey the laws of the Church concerning fasting and abstinence.

Most of the commandments, as given by Moses to the Israelites, were framed in the form of prohibitions, beginning with the words: "Thou shalt not . . ." But Christ summed them all up in the positive commandment, called the Great Commandment, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God . . ."

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St. John the Apostle, the Beloved Disciple, sat next to Jesus at the Last Supper. He tells how his head lay "close to the breast of Jesus." He tells how on that occasion his Master gave his commandment of love. "this is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15, 12-13).

St. John meditated deeply on these words and often spoke about them. The two letters of his in the New Testament are full of this theme. In the first letter he gives the simplest and most sublime definition of God in human language: "God is Love."

"See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are . . . Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love. In this the love of God was manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him" (John 3, 1 . . . 4, 7-9).

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POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

1. For what reasons can it be said that God's commandments are bonds of love uniting the Creator and his people?
2. Discuss the following statement: "My loyalty to God's commandments is the measure of my response to his love".
3. Why is it man's most important duty to adore God?
4. Compose a short prayer in which you feel you could best express your gratitude to God. What are the things for which you wish to thank him most?
5. What are the reasons why it is sinful to miss Sunday Mass deliberately?
6. List some voluntary acts of self-denial which you think would best help people to become more Christlike.