

The Twentieth Sunday after Trinity

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT

Where do so many rogues come from that must daily be hanged, beheaded, and broken upon the wheel? Don't they come from disobedience to parents, because they will not submit to discipline in kindness? By God's punishment, they cause us to behold their misfortune and grief. For it seldom happens that such perverse people die a natural or timely death.

But the godly and obedient have this blessing: they live long in pleasant quietness and see their children's children (as said above) to the third and fourth generation [Psalm 128].

Experience teaches that where there are honorable, old families who do well and have many children, they certainly owe their origin to the fact that some of them were brought up well and were full of regard for their parents. On the other hand, it is written of the wicked, "May his posterity be cut off; may his name be blotted out in the second generation!" (Psalm 109:13). Therefore, note well how great a thing in God's sight obedience is. He values it so highly, is so highly pleased with it, and rewards it richly. He also enforces punishment rigorously on those who act against it.

All this I say that it may be well impressed upon the young [Deuteronomy 6:7]. No one believes how necessary this commandment is, although it has not been valued and taught under the papacy up to this point. These are simple and easy words, and everybody thought he knew them before. Therefore, people pass by them lightly, crave other things, and do not see and believe that God is so greatly offended if these words are disregarded. They don't see that a person does a work so well pleasing and precious if he follows them.

THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT

Indeed, we see and experience this being fulfilled daily before our eyes. No stolen or dishonestly acquired possession thrives. How many there are who rake and scrape day and night, and yet grow not a farthing richer! Though they gather much, they must suffer so many plagues and misfortunes that they cannot enjoy it with cheerfulness

nor leave it to their children. But since no one cares, and we go on as though it did not concern us, God must visit us in a different way and teach us manners by imposing one taxation after another. Or He must billet a troop of soldiers upon us. In one hour they empty our moneyboxes and purses and do not quit as long as we have a farthing left. In addition, by way of thanks, they burn and devastate house and home, and they outrage and kill wife and children.

In short, if you steal much, you can expect that much will be stolen from you. He who robs and gets by violence and wrong will submit to one who shall act the same way toward him. For God is master of this art. Since everyone robs and steals from one another, God punishes one thief by means of another. Or else where would we find enough gallows and ropes?

THE NINTH AND TENTH COMMANDMENTS

These two commandments are given quite exclusively to the Jewish people. Nevertheless, in part they also apply to us. For they do not interpret them as referring to unchastity or theft. These are forbidden well enough above. They also thought that they had kept all those commands when they had done or not done the external act. Therefore, God has added these two commandments in order that it be considered sinful and forbidden to desire or in any way to aim at getting our neighbor's wife or possessions. He added them especially because under the Jewish government manservants and maidservants were not free as now to serve for wages as long as they pleased. Jewish servants were their master's property with their body and all they had, as were cattle and other possessions [Deuteronomy 15:12–18]. Further, every man had power over his wife to put her away publicly by giving her a bill of divorce and to take another [Deuteronomy 24:1–4]. Therefore, they were in constant danger among each other. If one took a fancy to another's wife, he might declare any reason both to dismiss his own wife and to estrange his neighbor's wife from him, so that he might get her in a way that appeared right. That was not considered a sin or a disgrace among them, just as it is hardly considered a sin now with hired help, when an owner dismisses his manservant or maidservant or takes another's servants from him in any way.

In this way they interpreted these commandments, and that rightly (although the scope of the commandment reaches somewhat farther and higher). No one should consider or intend to get what belongs to another, such as his wife, servants, house and estate, land, meadows, cattle. He should not take them even with a show of right, by a trick, or to his neighbor's harm. For above, in the Seventh Commandment, the vice is forbidden where one takes for himself the possessions of others or withholds them from his neighbor. A person cannot rightly do these things. But here it is also forbidden for you to alienate anything from your neighbor, even though you could do so with honor in the eyes of the world, so that no one could accuse or blame you as though you had gotten it wrongfully.

THE SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR

This is the first point, especially for the benefit of the cold and indifferent, that they may come to their senses and wake up. It is certainly true, as I have found in my own experience, and as everyone will find in his own case, that if a person stays away from the sacrament, day by day he will become more and more callous and cold, and eventually spurn it altogether. To avoid this, we must examine our heart and conscience and act like a person who really desires to be right with God. The more we do this, the more will our heart be warmed and kindled, and it will not grow entirely cold.