



By Tom Hoopes

**ISSUE:** Churchgoing people know how to follow rules. We also know how to skirt them. We know exactly where the line is, and how to stay technically in-bounds, even while we indulge in exactly what that commandment forbids.

**DISCUSSION:** So here is a crash course on the Ten Commandments, focusing on the unique temptations we “religious” people have against them. Included are quotes from the *Catechism* and *Compendium of the Catechism*, because we are also the kind of people who want to know that this is “official” stuff.

### **First commandment: Do we follow God or religion?**

*Have no other gods before me:* “To attribute the efficacy of prayers or of sacramental signs to their mere external performance, apart from the interior dispositions that they demand, is to fall into superstition.”

It has been said that to break the first commandment you don’t need to worship idols—you just have to look to something other than God for salvation or happiness. It can be maddeningly easy for religious people to fail here. We often look to religion itself to save us. We fulfill our Sunday obligation—by sitting through Mass while we plan our week. We go to confession—and repeat the list we always repeat, with no real plan to change.

*Remedy:* Read the Pharisee and the Publican (Luke 18:9–14). What we need is the gift of the Holy Spirit called “fear of the Lord”: reverence and awe of God. Make religion a way to God, rather than vice versa.

### **Second commandment: Do we practice, not just preach?**

*Do not take the Lord’s name in vain:* “The faithful should bear witness to the Lord’s name.”

We good church people probably already instinctively say “jeesh” and “gosh” to avoid taking the Lord’s name in vain. But there is a way that we might often use his name in vain: by preaching what we don’t practice. The too-easy fix for this is to not preach, and maybe we do overdo religious talk a bit. But an even better fix is to practice more, not preach less.

*Remedy:* Start doing those things we urge in others. Avoid our favorite sin. Serve at the shelter. Pray the daily Rosary. As someone once said, “Your life is the only Gospel many people will ever read.”

### **Third commandment: Do we have God-free Sundays?**

*Keep holy the Lord’s Day:* “Bless the Sabbath and declare it sacred.”

You may know someone like my friend’s pious aunt who goes to Mass every day except Sunday. She goes twice on Saturday, once to the daily Mass and once to the Vigil. There is nothing wrong with going to Saturday vigil. But doing so shouldn’t make Sunday a “God-free” day, either. Neither should Mass in the morning make the rest of the day just like any other.

*Remedy:* Have a Sunday routine that makes the day special: a family activity, a special meal (we do a big family breakfast), a family Rosary, or a “pro-Catholic” movie.

#### **Fourth commandment: Is our family devoted to “human mercy?”**

*Honor your father and mother.* “As they grow up, children should continue to respect their parents.”

“Dear Mom, I’ve never told you how much I love you,” begins the letter many wish they had written. Another begins: “I’m so sorry.” Or perhaps it’s time to write the one to our children that says: “I just want you to know that all is forgiven.” We religious people are rightly great admirers of Divine Mercy. But sometimes human mercy is what a situation [also] needs.

*Remedy.* Say a Divine Mercy chaplet for the grace of human mercy in our life.

#### **Fifth commandment: Do we ruin people’s good name?**

*You shall not kill.* “The person who gives scandal becomes his neighbor’s tempter...he may even draw his brother into spiritual death.”

As good churchgoers, we know we aren’t supposed to engage in judgmental gossip. So we have our own rules. We would never say, “So-and-so sure is steeped in sin.” Instead, we say, “You should pray for so-and-so. She sure seems to be steeped in sin.” Worse is when we say, “You should pray for Father. My brother’s friend’s sister heard this terrible rumor about him.”

*Remedy.* Some Catholic friends of ours have a code word to politely remind each other when they start gossiping. Others are armed with ready-made subject changers to derail gossip: “I’ll pray. But before I forget, how is your mom doing?” or “Before I forget, what local restaurants are good?”

*“Lord, help me be like Mary and Joseph, who followed you both religiously and personally. You know I love you. Help me to love you more each day by following your commandments with honesty, passion, and joy.”*

*Catholic Digest:* Tom Hoopes. “10 Ways Religious People Break the Commandments.” <http://www.catholicdigest.com/articles/faith/knowledge/2013/11-18/10-ways-religious-people-break-the-commandments>.