



Sovereign Order of Saint John of Jerusalem ©
* Knights of Malta *

Chancellor's Update

September
2004

Additional Observations on the Fifth Commandment

After discussing the sins against the Fifth Commandment, the Council Fathers at Trent stress the necessity to “prescribe remedies for so dangerous a disease.” To form a just conception of the wickedness of murder, they remind us that God Himself in Holy Scripture commanded that even a beast, who harms a man should be put to death. *For I will require the blood of your lives at the hand of every beast, and at the hand of man...Whosoever shall shed man’s blood, his blood shall be shed: for man was made to the image of God* (Gen. ix 5-6).

“The murderer is the worst enemy of his species, and consequently of nature. To the utmost he destroys the universal work of God by the destruction of man, since God declares that He created all things for man’s sake...He who makes away with God’s image offers great injury to God, and almost seems to lay violent hands on God Himself!”

Positive Part of this Commandment

Love of Neighbor. Christ requires us to have peace with all men. Furthermore, since Saint John admonishes us, *Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer* (1 John iii 15), we must practice charity and love. Saint Paul reminds us, *Charity is patient, charity is kind* (1 Cor. xiii 4). Kindness to others reminds us to help those in need by feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty and clothing the naked. Finally, Jesus advises us, *Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you* (Matt. v 44).

“But the most important duty of all...is to pardon and forgive from the heart the injuries which we may have received from others. The Sacred Scriptures frequently admonish and exhort us to a full compliance with this duty.” Those who fulfill this duty are called *blessed*, and God pardons those who do so, “while He refuses pardon to those who neglect it, or refuse to obey it.”

Forgiving Injuries. Because revenge is almost natural to man, the Council Fathers emphasize that Christians should forgive and forget injuries. Three considerations help the Christian accomplish this.

“First, he who thinks himself injured ought above all to be persuaded that the man on whom he desires to be revenged was not the principal cause of the loss or injury. Thus that admirable man, Job, when violently injured by the Sabeans, the Chaldeans, and by Satan, took no account of these, but as a righteous and very holy man exclaimed with no less truth than piety: *The Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away* (Job i 21). The words and the example of that man of patience should, therefore, convince Christians that **whatever**

chastisements we endure in this life come from the hand of God, the Father and Author of all justice and mercy. He chastises us not as enemies, but, in His infinite goodness, corrects us as children. To view the matter in its true light, men, in these cases, are nothing more than the ministers and agents of God. It is true that one man may cherish the worst feelings towards another, he may harbor the most malignant hatred against him; but, without the permission of God, he can do him no injury...

“St. Chrysostom has ably and learnedly said that no man is injured but by himself. Let the man, who considers himself injured by another, consider the matter in the right way...Although he may have experienced injury from external causes, he is himself his greatest enemy by wickedly staining his soul with hatred, malevolence and envy.

“Second, there are two **advantages**, which are the special rewards of those, who, influenced by a holy desire to please God, freely forgive injuries. God has promised that he who forgives shall himself obtain forgiveness of sins...Next, the forgiveness of injuries ennobles and perfects our nature; for by it man is in some degree made like to God.”

“Third, **disadvantages** arise from the refusal to pardon others. The unforgiving man should know that hatred is not only a grievous sin, but also that the longer it is indulged the more deeply rooted it becomes. The man, of whose heart this passion has once taken possession, thirsts for the blood of his enemy. Filled with the hope of revenge, he will spend his days and nights brooding over some evil design, so that his mind seems never to rest from malignant projects, or even from thoughts of blood. It would be extremely difficult for such a person to pardon an offence, or even to mitigate his hostility. His hatred is like a wound in which the weapon remains firmly embedded.”

The Council Fathers advise that one sin of hatred can beget many sins and evil consequences. “How can anyone view in a favorable light the words or action of him whom he hates? Hence arise rash and unjust judgments, anger, envy, detractions, and other evils often connected by ties of friendship or blood.”

Remedies Against Hatred

Jesus should be our model for imitation. On the cross He prayed charitably for those responsible for His crucifixion: *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do* (Luke xxiii 34). “Another remedy, prescribed by Ecclesiasticus, is to call to mind death and judgment: *Remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin* (Eccl. vii 40). As if the Scripture writer had said: Reflect frequently and again and again that you must soon die, and since at death there will be nothing you desire or need more than great mercy from God, that now you should keep that mercy always before your mind. Thus the cruel desire for revenge will be extinguished; for you can discover no means better adapted, none more efficacious to obtain the mercy of God than the forgiveness of injuries and love towards those who in word or deed may have injured you or yours.”

To be continued

Copyright 2004 by the Sovereign Order of Saint John of Jerusalem, Inc. All rights reserved. The O.S.J. Messenger and the Chancellor's Update are among the authorized publications of the Sovereign Order of Saint John of Jerusalem, Inc. and the Sovereign Order of Saint John of Jerusalem-Knights of Malta. World headquarters and Convent of the Order are located in Reading, Pennsylvania in the United States of America.



Jerusalem 1048-1291, Cyprus 1291-1310, Rhodes 1311-1523, Malta 1530-1798, Russia 1798-1907, U.S.A. 1908-