

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As I mentioned in last weekend's article, I will be spending the next several weeks going deeper into the Ten Commandments. This week, we'll be looking at the first commandment:

I am the Lord your God, you shalt not have any strange gods before Me.

God gave this first commandment to the children of Israel just after He liberated them from the slavery of Egypt. For about 400 years, they had been in Egypt, and had been immersed in the pagan culture of Egypt. The Egyptians worshiped all sorts of gods (who, of course, were not really gods at all, but demons – creatures of God gone bad). God knew that He had to make it clear that the Israelites were not to worship anyone by Him, for there is only one God. When the people of Israel failed at this (making the golden calves), God then gave them the restrictions on food as well – they couldn't eat pork, for instance. Why? While the Egyptians worshiped all sorts of gods, many of them being animals (sheep, cattle, etc.), they did *not* worship pigs. Hence, the Egyptians ate a lot of pork. God forbade eating pork so that the people of Israel would have to eat the other "Egyptian gods"... and so make it that they could not go back to Egypt, and so help remove the idolatry from their hearts. (Of course, Jesus, knowing that this idolatry was finally removed from the Israelite hearts, declared all foods clean [see Mark 7:19], and so we can eat bacon again... and it is good!)

At the heart of this commandment is truth – when we worship things that are not God, we are harmed by it. God wants us to worship in truth, to worship He who alone is God.

While most people today do not worship Athena or Zeus, Ba'al or Molech, this first commandment is still broken in many ways. When we get involved in the "New Age," we're allowing a false spirituality to be a part of our lives. (Beware: if a spirituality does not come from the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we're getting involved with a spiritual power that is NOT God [see I John 4:1-3] – and there are only two sources of spiritual power – God and the devil.) God forbids us to go to horoscopes, fortune tellers, Tarot Cards, Ouija boards and the like not because they are bogus, but because they are real – and really draw us away from God. Getting involved in Wicca or Reiki open us to spiritual powers that go against God. Even Yoga is dangerous – and a sin – because traditional yoga puts the body in positions that give homage to Hindu gods. This goes directly against the first commandment of having no other gods.

Okay, let's say that you don't do any of the things mentioned above. Still, my experience is that this first commandment is the *least* confessed commandment of all of the commandments, yet, it is also one that is most often broken. Why do I say this? When we sin – every time we freely choose sin – we're saying there is something in our lives more important than God. This can become a god to us. For instance, St. Paul says that greed can be idolatry (Colossians 3:5). Things can take over our hearts. Relationships with other people can become more important than our relationship with God. Whenever we break any of the other commandments, we are in some way breaking this first one – we say we don't trust God to be God, we make ourselves or other things or people greater than the God of the universe who loves us. This commandment is a commandment against pride (when we place ourselves as the moderator of what is good and evil, especially as seen in relativism), as well as anything that goes against proper priority.

Fr. Larry Richards puts it this way: If at the end of the day you're asked, "Did you eat today?" and you answer "yes." Then you're asked, "Did you pray today?" and you answer "No" – you love food more than you love God. Did you get on your phone today? Did you check your Facebook page today? Did you watch TV today? Did you talk to your husband or wife, girlfriend or boyfriend today? If you answer "yes" to any of these, but "no" to praying, the hard truth is that you love those things more than you love God. And this breaks the first commandment.

God didn't make this commandment because He's selfish; He made it because, like every good parent, He loves us. He wants us to grow, to flourish, to be healthy and good in the things that matter most – the things of eternity. He loves us enough to tell us that having things or people as a greater priority than Him hurt us and keeps us from becoming the best-version-of-ourselves.

I pray that, with the help of God, we can break down all of the idols in our lives, and place God first in our hearts.