

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This week, we'll look at the seventh commandment:

### **7. You shall not steal.**

At the core of this commandment is justice. Justice means giving people their due, what is owed to them. There are two parts to this commandment – the negative and the positive. Both parts have to do with our relationship with God; remember that the second part of the commandments (commandments 4-10) are about how we are in relationship with God through relationship with others.

The negative side of the commandment is what we should NOT do: we shall not steal. Obviously, this commandment forbids stealing, theft, robbery. Most people who are reading this probably have not had the problem of an ongoing habit of shoplifting, so I'm going to suggest some things covered by this commandment that might not be obvious: stealing cable and cheating on your taxes (very apt for this time of year, huh?). How about ideas? To take someone's idea and put it forward as if it were your own is stealing (this could be plagiarism, or stealing ideas of a coworker and getting the credit). Defrauding someone is a sin. If you sell your car as if it were in good shape, even though you know it is a lemon, you're sinning against the seventh commandment. Even stealing office supplies is a sin. Jesus tells us that

**“The person who is trustworthy in very small matters is also trustworthy in great ones; and the person who is dishonest in very small matters is also dishonest in great ones.”** (Luke 16:10)

We might also want to remember that *time* is a commodity, one for which we sometimes get paid. When we are working, when we are “on the clock” do we steal time from our company? Do we do personal work, check our personal e-mail, Facebook or Instagram, when we are supposed to be doing our work? This is stealing, and hurts our souls, hurts those from whom we steal, and hurts our relationship with God and with others.

Now for the positive side of this commandment. The primary positive aspect (what we are morally obligated to do) is restitution. Again, this is about giving people their due. If you have stolen something, you owe restitution. Restitution means making up for what was stolen. If you took something, you must give it back. If you are not able to give it back, you must find some way to make up for the loss. Sometimes this may look like giving an equal value of the stolen item to charity. In order to be forgiven, restitution must be made. Who must make restitution? Of course, the person who stole, but also those who cooperate in, encourage or conceal the theft.

The positive side of this commandment enjoins us not only to restitution but also to almsgiving – giving to the poor. We are obliged to help the poor and the needy. Think about it this way, when we are face to face with God, and He asks us why there were so many people impoverished and starving and we did nothing about it, if we were to answer, “But God, they weren't my children,” He will most certainly answer, “No, they were mine.” We are connected to each person, for all belong to God. Obviously, we can't help everyone in the world who is suffering, but we can help some... and we have an obligation to do so.

The Old Testament mandate was the tithe: ten percent of income went to God – either to the Temple to support worship, or the poor. Personally, I have been tithing for decades. I have found that even when things get tight, when I give God what is His due, He always takes care of me – He has gotten me through some very tough times. This past January, after consultation with the Parish Finance Council and Parish Pastoral Council, I decided to tithe the weekly collections – ten percent of the weekly collections is set aside to help those in need. It takes an act of faith, but I believe God will be faithful. He always has been. This means that when you choose to give to St. Patrick Parish you both support worship of God and you help care for His poor children.

You might make the comment that the tithe is an Old Testament idea, but we are New Testament people. Good point. In the New Testament (look at the first several chapters of the Acts of the Apostles), the Christians give ALL of their belongings to the Church, and the Church is responsible for caring for their needs. Yeah... maybe we should just start with the Old Testament, before moving to the New Testament!

May this reflection on the seventh commandment help us to have a proper respect for what is due to others, and help us to be generous with those in need.