

THE COMMANDMENTS.

The Second Commandment:

Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.

1. By this commandment God requires us to respect His Holy Name and to perform faithfully what we have promised.

2. By it we are forbidden (1) to swear in vain, (2) to fail in our sworn promises, (3) to blaspheme, and (4) to curse.

3. To *swear* or *take an oath* is to call God to witness some promise or statement we make.

4. An oath may be taken in one or more of three ways, viz., (1) *verbally*, i.e., by using a form of words, such as, « I swear », «I take my oath », and so on; (2) or *by a certain gesture*, e. g., holding up one's hand, placing one's hand or finger on the Bible or a seal, kissing the Bible; (3) *by written deed*.

5. Merely using the form of an oath does not necessarily mean that an oath has been taken; at the time of uttering the words the intention must be present in the mind to call God to be a witness to the truth of the promise or statement made.

6. Swearing by a creature is equivalent to calling God to be our witness, for it is invoking indirectly Him who has made the creature. Thus it is asking God to be our witness if we swear by heaven or the stars, and so on.

(1) Swearing in vain.

7. We may swear in vain in three ways, viz., (1) by swearing falsely, (2) by swearing unnecessarily, and (3) by swearing to do what is contrary to

the law of God. That this last is a mortal sin is self-evident and calls for no explanation.

8. To *swear falsely (a false oath)* is to swear to something which one knows is untrue or to make a promise one has no intention of keeping.

9. In swearing falsely, even in small matters, we commit a grievous sin, viz., the sin of *perjury*. Hence we are guilty of mortal sin each time we deliberately take a false oath.

10. What makes the false oath so grave an offence is the fact that we call God to be witness to a lie, a terrible insult to the Almighty.

11. If there is any doubt at all in our minds as to the truth of a thing, we must refrain from swearing for fear of being guilty of perjury. In any case, it would be taking a *rash oath*.

12. And indeed in order to be safe from all risk of falling into this sin we must never swear at all, either by our faith or on our conscience, or by any other thing.

13. To *swear unnecessarily (unnecessary oath)* is to swear when there is no occasion for doing so or when the matter in question is of so trifling a character as not to require an oath.

14. It is a sin to swear unnecessarily, because we thereby fail in our respect for God by making Him, the Almighty, a witness to matters so derogatory to His supreme dignity.

15. It is however lawful to swear or take an oath whenever God's honour or our own or our neighbour's good requires it, as, for instance, in a court of law when both human and divine justice demands that the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth shall be told. In all such cases the oath must be taken with all due respect and solemnity, it being borne in mind that in doing so we honour God who is the truth itself.

Explanation of the Plate.

16. *In the principal picture* is represented the perjury of St. Peter. This apostle, having followed his Divine Master into the courtyard of the house of Caiphas, the High Priest, had sat down to warn himself, when a maidservant, observing him, said to those present: « This man also was

with Jesus of Nazareth ». Whereupon Peter declared on oath: « I know not *the man* ». (*Matt.* XXVI, 71-72.)

17. *In the small picture on the right* we see Jacob and Esau. Returning one day tired and hungry from hunting from the chase, the latter begged of his younger brother to give him the mess of lentils he had just prepared for himself. Jacob consented on condition that Esau would swear to yield to him in return his right of the first-born. Esau readily assented, and what was totally unnecessary, swore to do so, losing in consequence his birthright. (*Gen.* XXV, 29-34.)

18. *In the small picture on the left* are depicted the seven men crucified in the reign of King David because of Saul's broken oath. In taking possession of the land of Canaan Joshua had promised the Gabaonites that he would do them no harm. But Saul had them put to the sword and God punished this perjury by afflicting the whole of Israel with a famine. This had been going on for three years, when David summoned the Gabaonites and asked them how he could atone for the outrage they had suffered. They demanded that seven of the adult sons of Saul should be given up to them. These were accordingly given up and were crucified on a mountain top to satisfy the divine justice. (*II Kings* XXI, 1-6.)
