

28. July 2023

The dignity of chastity

Ex 20:1-17

And the Lord spoke all these words: I am the Lord thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt not have strange gods before me. Thou shalt not make to thyself a graven thing, nor the likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, nor of those things that are in the waters under the earth. Thou shalt not adore them, nor serve them: I am the Lord thy God, mighty, jealous, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me. And shewing mercy unto thousands to them that love me, and keep my commandments. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain: for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that shall take the name of the Lord his God in vain. Remember that thou keep holy the sabbath day. Six days shalt thou labour, and shalt do all thy works. But on the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: thou shalt do no work on it, thou nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy beast, nor the stranger that is within thy gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all things that are in them, and rested on the seventh day: therefore the Lord blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it. Honour thy father and thy mother, that thou mayest be longlived upon the land which the Lord thy God will give thee. Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house: neither shalt thou desire his wife, nor his servant, nor his handmaid, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is his.

How important are God's everlasting commandments in the lives of people! Only their observance guarantees them eternal life and, moreover, establishes a profound order in their earthly life. We can see what happens when the commandments are not obeyed: chaos enters into human relationships and the life of nations is darkened.

Of all the commandments, I would like to focus today on the sixth: "Thou shalt not commit adultery". Church teaching has made it clear that this commandment also extends to fornication, that is, not to engage in sexual intercourse outside marriage. At

the present time, it seems particularly important to study this commandment, since its non-observance is bringing about so many evils. In our time, sensitivity to the dignity of marriage and the value of chastity is increasingly being lost. Unfortunately, it is to be regretted that even within the Church clear guidance is not always and everywhere being offered to people in this area, for confusion threatens to penetrate her more and more.

Admittedly, for many people the fulfilment of this commandment is an enormous effort, as we are often surrounded by a sexualised environment, in which both fashion and the media bombard people with provocations to draw them into the sphere of unhealthy eroticism. Added to this is the fact that the sense of chastity has been almost completely lost, so that efforts to flee from the occasions of sin have even become an object of ridicule.

Nevertheless, chastity and marital fidelity remain a very high good, which enables the person to live in God's grace and reflects the Lord's fidelity towards us, which strengthens us inwardly and makes us discover more and more our own dignity.

Premarital chastity preserves the integrity of the person, makes one strong and preserves the capacity to love, which in marriage is directed particularly towards a 'you'. If one has not been scattered and weakened by pre-marital sexuality, one will be able to give oneself completely to one's spouse and will be better able to remain faithful to him or her. Thus, the person can shine in all the inner beauty and harmony, living the gift of sexuality as God intended.

Sadly, many young people today fall at a premature age into the trap of perverted sexuality, thus losing the enormous treasure of virginal beauty. It could be said that almost no young person escapes this trap unless he or she grew up in a good and godly family, or had an authentic encounter with Jesus at an early age. Even some governments promote "sex education" programmes, in which young people are incited to commit impure acts, causing serious damage to their later development.

How wise, however, are God's commandments, which invite us to walk the straight path! The commandment 'not to commit adultery' means not to cause suffering to another person or to oneself; it means not to betray love; it means to know better the mystery of God's love for us, for St. Paul speaks of conjugal love as a reflection of the love between Christ and the Church (cf. Eph 5:25-33).

Despite the seriousness of lust, God offers conversion and healing to those who have lost themselves in unbridled sexuality, provided they are willing to change their lives. With some effort, it is even possible to acquire a "new chastity", though not the integrity and innocence of original virginity. This "new chastity" will be founded on a deep understanding of the value of God's commandments and an awareness of the evil of sin. It will pay great attention not to violate these commandments, avoiding every act, word, gesture or look that is contrary to chastity. In the original chastity, this modesty is a kind of inner sense born of innocence and integrity; in the 'new chastity', on the other hand, it comes particularly from gratitude for having experienced God's love and forgiveness, and from the knowledge of the filthiness of sin.

Even if we have fallen very deeply in our lives, God will grant us the grace to regain our original beauty and to keep His commandments, if we repent and turn to Him in sincerity.

FINAL NOTE: Starting tomorrow, we will begin a Novena to God the Father, leading up to August 7, when we will celebrate the Feast of the Heavenly Father. The origin of this Feast is in a private revelation of 1932, which was recognised at that time by the local bishop. God the Father appeared to a nun and expressed, among other things, His desire that a liturgical Feast be established in the Church to honour the First Person of the Holy Trinity. Although this has not yet been officially established, we can now celebrate it privately and honour our Heavenly Father in a special way on this day, preparing ourselves during the 9 preceding days to know, honour and love Him more deeply.