

## The Sixth Commandment — Moral Purity (The Sanctus).

Text: Exo 20:14

Suggested Hymns:

152, 129, 398, 516, 358

1) Atonement for human lust

2) Christ purifies us by making us members of His body

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Exodus 20:14, *“You shall not commit adultery.”* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Today we are considering the 6th Commandment which concerns moral purity and we will also look at the Sanctus in the liturgy. In the beginning, in the Garden of Eden it is clear that God Himself had instituted marriage and sex life.

And it is also very clear that the sin of Eve was lust. She *“saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise.”*<sup>1</sup> This is the threefold drive which St. John speaks of, *“the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.”*<sup>2</sup>

It was this that started the shameful history of sin, so that it might be said that the desire for what is forbidden, is the fundamental evil of this world. The results of this are enormous and varied and are nowhere so evident as in our own country. In 2012 there were just over 123,000<sup>3</sup> marriages but sadly there were nearly 50,000<sup>4</sup> divorces. In such cases it is usually the almighty dollar which gets the devotion and service of thousands of people.

If you analyse the police records, you will find that in almost every case an illegitimate desire has been responsible for the crime. Scripture says in Matthew 15:19, <sup>19</sup> *“For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.”*

Therefore any reformation, if it is to get to the root of evil, must do something to change man's lustful heart. The Christian religion does this in a manner unparalleled by any other method. Let us see how it works. May the Lord bless our meditation.

### **1. Atonement For Human Lust.**

Some atonement had to be made for the sin of lust if man was to regain that blessed status from which he had been tumbled by this same sin. Since he had forfeited his childlike innocence, he could no longer be a child of God. Since he had defamed his divine holiness, he could no longer live with the holy Lord.

Since he had set his desire against God, he was deprived of that blessing which always comes with obedience. So the problem arose: How could man recapture what he had lost? This was the problem which God made His own, seeing that it was too much for His fallen creatures. Restoration was impossible for man but not for man's Creator.

The very first act of the incarnate Christ was to make compensation for the primary sin of lust. He began to do this when He chose to be born of a virgin. What happened in the body of His blessed mother is rightly called an immaculate conception. This is not to be confused with the immaculate conception in Mary's mother, as taught by the Roman Catholic Church. The physical process of bringing the infant Jesus into the world was unspotted by any unhallowed desire.

In human procreation the rule is, *"Every time there is generation of one human being by another, through the union of a man and a woman, there is the propagation of original sin."* Adam was blamed for sin and everyone who has a human father has original sin.

Such a union had not taken place when our Lord was born because Mary was a virgin. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit. Consequently there was no taint of original sin in Mary's Son.

The angel Gabriel had foretold this at the Annunciation. When Mary asked how it could be that she could bear a child without being with a man, Gabriel replied, *"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God."*<sup>5</sup>

It was only by a suspension of the laws of nature that a sinless man could be born; and such a one had to come if any atonement for human lust was to be made.

Jesus always kept Himself pure. When His enemies later on tried to condemn Him, He challenged them, “*Which of you convicts me of sin?*”<sup>6</sup> They attempted to pin some offence on Him, but after many attempts they succeeded only in making their case ridiculous in the court of Caiaphas.

As our Lord was free of original sin, so He was free of actual sin. Jesus, and only Jesus, knew perfectly that blessedness which He Himself promised to the pure in heart. This is what our Catechism calls His “*active obedience.*”

When we speak of His “*passive obedience,*” the thing is turned around and we contemplate our holy Saviour as bearing the consequences of our sins.

Jesus who was free of all sins of the flesh was condemned to have His flesh tortured, broken, and crucified. The body which had never known lust was made the Victim of the sadistic lust of men. Jesus who was fairer than the children of men was made such a revolting spectacle that it was said of Him that “*there is no beauty that we should desire Him.*”<sup>7</sup>

So far into the depths did Jesus go in this act of atonement that He was almost dispossessed of His flesh. The very bones of His body could be numbered, and at the end, the gory corpse was laid in a grave in token that He had submitted to the death which is the wage of sin.

More than this: Our Saviour on the cross surrendered even the legitimate claims of His flesh, when He took leave of His mother and His best friend by committing each into the keeping of the other. Even these perfectly sanctified human loves He renounced so that He might make full satisfaction for the illegitimate kind. He desired nothing for Himself in order that He might give us everything.

## **2. Christ Purifies Us By Making Us Members Of His Body**

Jesus gives us what His perfect obedience gained for us by making us members of His body. This involves both the mystical body of Christ, which is the church; and the sacramental body, which we receive in the Lord’s Supper.

Both are holy. We believe in the holy Christian church, and we believe in Holy Communion. Our connection with each has the effect of transmitting the purity of Christ into ourselves.

In the sacrament the holy Lord enters into us, and thus we are incorporated again into the fellowship of the saints, <sup>17</sup> ***For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.***<sup>8</sup>

We are united to one another as we are united to Christ, and we are united in holiness. This connection between the sacramental body and the mystical body is a powerful thing. What is imparted to us is Christ, and Christ is holy; and the very sacrifice we commemorate reminds us that the body was broken and the blood was shed that we might be partakers of His holiness.

So the righteousness of the Son of God is extended to us, and we must, if we have any thoughtfulness or awareness at all, realise the obligation this imposes on us. We are the body of Christ, who have fed on His body.

For this purpose we come to the altar to refurbish our ideals, to clear away the rubbish that has obscured them, to receive new power to move toward them. As Augustine says, “*You hear what you are. ... Be that which you receive,*” namely, *the holy body. Live as a member of the body of Christ. Our task is to approximate the purity of the immaculate Christ, to whom we have prayed, “Create in me a clean heart, O God.”*

Scripture says in Ephesians 5:25-27, ***Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,*** <sup>26</sup> ***that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word,*** <sup>27</sup> ***that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.***

This means that the church is holy as a result of Christ’s loving and giving. Apart from Him there can be no holiness. We are holy because we are in Christ, members of ***“His body, and of His flesh and of His bones”*** as described in Ephesians 5:30. It is for this reason that we are so dependent on Christ for this purifying action that we come to His table.

The world in which we live is full of evil. We do not need dwell on that because you know it only too well. Its misery strikes at us from the outside, and its sin gnaws within. As Isaiah said, so must we all, ***“Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.”***<sup>9</sup>

But always and again it is our Christian privilege to turn away from the sordidness, wretchedness, and lust of this present world to Christ who is clean, blessed, and loving, to the holy God who has become Man so that unholy man might be with God. To God we lift up our hearts, as we leave behind all those things that make life a burden. To the Father of lights, to His holy angels, and to the whole company of heaven, we laud and magnify His glorious name, evermore praising Him and saying, "***Holy, holy, holy.***"

So we fix our eyes on God in the faith that, however ghastly a mess we may have made of things, He does not fail. We do not know the way, but God does and has shown it to us in Christ. Man destroys himself, his cities and his fields; he has even killed God's Son; but man is not able to alter the nature of God or prevent the purpose of God's mind.

God's is the Kingdom which cannot be moved, for it is beyond man's power to overthrow it. It stands for all that we are not, but through the mercy of the Most High we have been raised up to it and granted citizenship. There we find peace and joy, not in anything that is human and worldly, but in what is heavenly and divine.

We stand in the forecourt of heaven when we sing the Sanctus. *Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts; Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory; Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.* We are little children again, filled with wonder. We run to our Father and find happiness in His outstretched arms.

You see what happens, don't you? We become purified by the divine love. For the holiness of God is not an abstract thing; it has become humanised in Christ, and Christ is there in the sacrament.

It is not a thing to fear, for the very extension of it to us is proof of God's forgiving mercy. "***Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord,***" we sing, waving our palm branches, as it were, in a whole-hearted welcome to the Son of Righteousness. God has brought holiness into this evil world, and no one who is touched by it can ever be the same again.

The offer of it is a transforming power; those who receive it by faith are more and more conformed to the image of Jesus. His freedom from lust becomes theirs, and they become His saints, that is to say, His holy ones.

Concentrating on the selfless love of Jesus will drive lust out of any soul. Proverbs 23:7 says, <sup>7</sup> *For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.* Think about some delicious food for a few moments, and your mouth will begin to water. Stand on a stage and think about your hands, and they will begin to feel big as hams. Think day after day about some unlawful sensual pleasure, and you will not be satisfied until you have indulged in it. The trick is to get your mind on some other subject. But even that may be only a temporary help, for the mind, being evil, has a tendency to slip back to the old level.

Let us, then, rather say that the trick is to become utterly absorbed in something noble, to drive out the lower love by a higher one, to lose yourself in some selfless enterprise. The orator never feels his hands are awkward, because he becomes interested in his speech and his hands are subordinated to a higher purpose.

The man of God is not concerned with how and where he can see or hear some rude performance or himself participate in some immoral act, because his mind and heart are geared to the clean things of Christ.

And he thus moves on a higher level because he over and over again accepts Christ's invitation to remember Him. He repeatedly thinks of the holy Lord. He sings the Sanctus. He concentrates on the loving work of Jesus and on the immense offering of the cross; and this purifies him.

He learns that sanctity of life is not a thing to be achieved by him but is something bestowed by God. Therefore he is continually coming to the altar of God, asking for this gift, and as he receives it, is being raised one step higher toward the purity of his Lord.

A writer on this subject has pointed out that in the long history of the church three forces have been aligned against her: the force of the body; the force of ideas; and the force of passion.

The first, the 'force of the body,' was exemplified in the crucifixion and the early Christian persecutions. The result was only that the church grew strong. Later the 'force of ideas' attacked her life; all sorts of heresies arose. That enemy, too, was withstood; witness the great creeds and decrees of the early councils. These two forces are still arrayed against us. There is Christian persecution and heresy in our time too.

But the modern opposition to Christianity takes the form of the ‘force of passion.’ The spirit of the world opposes the Church not because of the way the world thinks, but because of the way the world lives. Not because the world cannot accept the Creed, but because the world cannot accept the Commandments.

The ‘force of passion’ so characteristic of our day includes, lust, desire, pleasure and greed. It shows itself in a general softening of lives, weakening of wills, and the glorification of sex. The aim of this power is to kill the spirit of the Body of Christ.

However, the ‘force of passion’ cannot stand the counterattack of divine love. The Church purifies it by the thrill of intimacy which surpasses that of flesh with flesh, namely union with the passion of Christ through Holy Communion. People will discover that they are really seeking love whose spirit is the soul of the Church, which conquers the force of passion by satisfying it with the irresistible force of the love of God.

There is only one way of purifying these conflicting and impure desires: bring them into the search-light of the love of Christ. Let His sacramental presence displace them. Let His purity come into you. Be reminded that you are members of His holy body. Lose yourself in the redeeming work for which Jesus Christ suffered and died and rose again. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 3:6

<sup>2</sup> 1 John 2:16

<sup>3</sup> 123,244

<sup>4</sup> 49,917

<sup>5</sup> Luke 1:35

<sup>6</sup> John 8:46

<sup>7</sup> Isaiah 53:2

<sup>8</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:17

<sup>9</sup> Isaiah 6:5