

The Seventh Commandment

YOU SHALL NOT STEAL

—CCC, NOS. 2401-2463



THE GOOD THIEF NEXT TO CHRIST CRUCIFIED

Respect People and Their Possessions

“The seventh Commandment forbids theft. Theft is the usurpation of another’s goods against the reasonable will of the owner. . . . Every manner of taking and using another’s property unjustly is contrary to the seventh commandment. The injustice committed requires reparation. Commutative justice requires the restitution of stolen goods.”

—CCC, nos. 2453-2454

The Seventh Commandment forbids stealing or theft, which involves taking someone’s money or property “against the reasonable will of the owner.” Theft includes not only robbery but also actions such as embezzlement, computer theft, counterfeit money, fraud, identity theft, copyright violations (including pirating things such as music or computer software), and mail scams.

To keep this Commandment, we need to acquire the virtues of moderation in our possessions, justice in our treatment of others, respect for their human dignity, and solidarity with all peoples. Moderation curbs our attachment to worldly goods and restrains our appetite for consumerism. Justice helps us respect our neighbor’s rights and be interested in their human well-being. Solidarity opens our hearts to identifying with the whole human family, reminding us of our common humanity.

We should not steal from each other, pay unfair salaries, cheat in business, or exploit people’s weaknesses to make money. Promises should be kept and contracts honored to the extent that the issues are morally just (cf. CCC, no. 2410). We need to safeguard property rights, pay our debts, and fulfill obligations freely incurred. The government has the right and duty to safeguard legitimate ownership of money and property and to protect people from robbery and injury.