



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS *GENERAL AUDIENCE*

St Peter's Square

Wednesday, 7 November 2018

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

Continuing the explanation of the Decalogue, today we come to the Seventh Word: “*You shall not steal*”.

In hearing this commandment we think of the theme of theft and of respect for other people’s property. There is no culture in which theft and the abuse of property are legal; human sensibility, in fact, is very sensitive in regard to the defence of property.

But it is worth opening ourselves up to a broader interpretation of this Word, focusing on the theme of the ownership of goods in the light of Christian wisdom.

The Social Doctrine of the Church speaks of the *universal destination of goods*. What does it mean? Let us listen to what the Catechism says: “In the beginning God entrusted the earth and its resources to the common stewardship of mankind to take care of them, master them by labor, and enjoy their fruits. The goods of creation are destined for the whole human race” (n. 2402).

Moreover: “The universal destination of goods remains primordial, even if the promotion of the common good requires respect for the right to private property and its exercise” (n. 2403).^[1]

Providence, however, did not create a world ‘of series’; there are differences, different conditions, different cultures, so one can live by providing for one another. The world is rich in resources to ensure the basic necessities for everyone. Yet many live in scandalous indigence and resources, used indiscriminately, are dwindling. But there is only one world! There is only one humanity!^[2] Today the world’s wealth is in the hands of the minority, of the few, and poverty, or rather misery and suffering, is in those of the many, of the majority.

If there is hunger on earth it is not for lack of food! Rather, due to market demands it is at times even destroyed, wasted. What is lacking is free and forward-looking entrepreneurship, which ensures proper production in a solidary framework, which ensures equitable distribution. The Catechism also states: “In his use of things man should regard the external goods he legitimately owns not merely as exclusive to himself but common to others also, in the sense that they can benefit others as well as himself” (n. 2404). All wealth, in order to be good, must have a social dimension.

The positive and broad meaning of the commandment “*you shall not steal*” appears in this perspective. “The ownership of any property makes its holder a steward of Providence” (*ibid.*). No one is the absolute owner of goods: he is a steward of goods. Ownership is a *responsibility*. ‘But I am rich in everything...’ — this is a responsibility that you have. And every good subtracted from the logic of God’s Providence is betrayed; it is betrayed in its most profound sense. What I truly own is what I am able to give. This is the measure to evaluate how I am able to manage riches, whether good or bad; this phrase is important: what I truly own is what I am able to give. If I am able to give, I am open, then I am rich not only in what I own, but also in generosity, generosity also as a duty to give wealth, so that all may partake of it. In fact if I cannot give something it is because that thing owns me, has power over me, and enslaves me. The possession of goods is an opportunity to multiply them creatively and to use them generously, and thereby to grow in charity and freedom.

Christ himself, “though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself” (Phil 2:6-7) and enriched us with his poverty (cf. 2 Cor 8:9).

While humanity takes pains *to have more*, God redeems it by becoming poor: that Crucified Man paid an incalculable ransom for everyone, on the part of God the Father, “rich in mercy” (Eph 2:4; cf. Jas 5:11). What makes us rich is not goods but love. So often we have heard what the People of God say: ‘The devil enters through the pockets’. It starts with a love of money, a hunger for possessions; then comes vanity: ‘Ah, I am rich and brag about it’; and, in the end, pride and arrogance. This is the devil’s way of acting in us. But the entrance is through the pocket.

Dear brothers and sisters, once again Jesus Christ reveals to us the full meaning of Scripture. “*You shall not steal*” means: love with your goods, make use of your means to love as best you can. Then your life becomes good and your property truly becomes a gift. Because life is not the time for possessing but for loving. Thank you.

Special Greetings

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today’s Audience, especially those from Denmark, Japan, the Philippines and the United States of America. I offer a special greeting

to the participants in the first International Men's Meeting here in Rome. Upon all of you, and your families, I invoke the Lord's blessings of joy and peace. God bless you!

I address a special thought to *young people*, to *the elderly*, to *the sick* and to *newlyweds*.

The day after tomorrow we shall celebrate the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica, the Cathedral of the Bishop of Rome. Pray for me, that I may always confirm my brothers and sisters in the faith.

[1] Cf. Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, n. 67: "Each community can take from the bounty of the earth whatever it needs for subsistence, but it also has the duty to protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations. 'The earth is the Lord's' (Ps 24:1); to him belongs 'the earth with all that is within it' (Dt 10:14). Thus God rejects every claim to absolute ownership: 'The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with me' (Lev 25:23)".

[2] Cf. Paul VI, Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, n. 17: "Each man is also a member of society; hence he belongs to the community of man. It is not just certain individuals but all men who are called to further the development of human society as a whole.... We are the heirs of earlier generations, and we reap benefits from the efforts of our contemporaries; we are under obligation to all men. Therefore we cannot disregard the welfare of those who will come after us to increase the human family. The reality of human solidarity brings us not only benefits but also obligations".
