DECEM PRAECEPTA · DECALOGUS

# The Ten Commandments

Written by the finger of God on two tables of stone and given to Moses on Mount Sinai (Exodus 20; Deuteronomy 5), the Decalogue states the natural law that binds every person. Christ did not abolish it but fulfilled it: "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matthew 19:17).



*Rembrandt, Moses with the Tablets of the Law, 1659 · Gemäldegalerie, Berlin*

THE GREAT COMMANDMENT

*"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. And the second is like to this: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments dependeth the whole law and the prophets."*

— Matthew 22:37–40

FIRST TABLE · I–III

### Love of God

Our duties toward God: worship, reverence for His name, and the sanctifying of His day.

SECOND TABLE · IV–X

### Love of Neighbor

Our duties toward others: family, life, purity, property, truth, and the desires of the heart.

*Numbered here as in the Catholic tradition, following St. Augustine.*

## I — I am the Lord thy God; thou shalt not have strange gods before Me.

**Commands** faith, hope, charity, and the worship due to God alone.

**Forbids** idolatry, superstition, the occult, sacrilege, heresy, despair and presumption.

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

**Commands** reverence for God's name and holy things, and keeping lawful oaths and vows.

**Forbids** blasphemy, cursing, irreverent use of holy names, and false or rash oaths.

## III — Remember thou keep holy the Sabbath day.

**Commands** keeping Sunday, the Lord's Day, holy by Mass, prayer and rest.

**Forbids** missing Mass without grave cause, and unnecessary servile work or business.

## IV — Honor thy father and thy mother.

**Commands** love, respect and obedience toward parents and lawful superiors; and parents' care for their children's souls and bodies.

**Forbids** disrespect, disobedience in lawful things, and neglect of family duties.

## V — Thou shalt not kill.

**Commands** safeguarding our own and our neighbor's life, health and soul.

**Forbids** murder, abortion, suicide, euthanasia, hatred, unjust anger, fighting, drunkenness and scandal.

## VI — Thou shalt not commit adultery.

**Commands** chastity in word and deed, according to one's state of life, and fidelity in marriage.

**Forbids** adultery, fornication and every impure act, as well as immodesty in dress, speech and entertainment.

## VII — Thou shalt not steal.

**Commands** justice and honesty, paying debts and just wages, and restoring what was taken.

**Forbids** theft, fraud, cheating, unjust damage to property, and wasting another's goods.

## VIII — Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

**Commands** truthfulness, protecting our neighbor's good name, and keeping secrets.

**Forbids** lies, perjury, calumny, detraction, gossip, and rash judgment.

## IX — Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife.

**Commands** purity of heart, and guarding the eyes and the imagination.

**Forbids** willfully entertaining impure thoughts and desires.

## X — Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's goods.

**Commands** contentment with what we have, and generosity toward the poor.

**Forbids** envy, greed, and the desire to gain another's goods unjustly.