



Opening Question:

*Have you ever been jealous of others' possessions?
Have you ever felt someone was jealous of your
possessions?*

We are blessed to live in a time of abundance. Our needs are met and our desires for goods are fulfilled. Yet, there is a dark side to this rosy picture. Some people assume they can scam and bully others into giving up private property. This attitude can be summed up in a cynical remark: "What's yours is mine." Of course, this flies in the face of the Seventh Commandment:

You shall not steal.

Exodus 20:15

This commandment extends far beyond the ownership of material possessions, however. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church stated:

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.

Catechism of the Catholic Church 2404

The right to private property is a means to an end not an end in and of itself. It is meant for the good of others as well as a good for the owner himself. To this end, government should protect that right as it is meant to promote the virtues of justice and charity.

What the Commandment Forbids

The Seventh Commandment forbids theft, especially essential needs like food, shelter, and clothing. The Commandment demands fair business practices, just wages, and an honest effort to provide reasonable services to clients. It requires promises and contracts between parties to be equitable and executed in good faith.



But the commandment extends beyond the loss of material possessions to the dignity of the person and even to God's creation. It forbids depriving people of their right to self determination. Slavery and human trafficking should be prosecuted by law. It also demands that animals be treated humanely and the environment be used wisely for the good of humanity.

God said to humans,

"Look, I have given you all kinds of fruit and grain to eat. And I have given the green plants as food for everything else that breathes, including animals, both wild and tame, and birds.

Genesis 1:29-30

Economic Systems

The Church considers the human person as the highest value. It condemns philosophies or government policies that reduce the person to a mere agent in an economic system. On the one hand, it rejects communism and radical forms of socialism that assert total state control and deprives people the right to private property. It also rejects fascism that dictates the terms of production for private business firms and orders people to meet those terms. On the other hand, the Church condemns pure capitalism with its belief in self-regulating markets and rejected any government intervention. Under this system,

people are subject to the pain of boom and bust business cycles. They also suffer a lack of goods due to monopolies, fixed prices, and the accumulation of vast wealth in the hands of a few. The Church argues for a middle road between state dominance and unfettered capitalism.

Reasonable regulation of the marketplace and economic initiatives, in keeping with a just hierarchy of values and a view to the common good, is to be commended.

Catechism of the Catholic Church 2425

The Dignity of Work

People need to work in order to pay for the necessities of life. But, work itself is part of God's plan for humanity. In the creation story,

The Lord took the first human and put him into the garden of Eden in order to cultivate and maintain it.

Genesis 2:15

So, work has a dignity that can lead to fulfillment. Work can lead to economic initiative with the creation of new innovations, new opportunities, and new businesses. Creative people have a right to partake in the fruits of their labor. Employers, however, do have certain responsibilities to their employees. To hire without discrimination. To pay workers a just wage. To negotiate disputes with them in good faith. Government also has responsibilities. To promote freedom and the right to private property. To maintain a stable currency and provide services that encourage work. Above all, both private and public institutions should stress values and seek the common good.

Concern for the Poor

Nations of the world have a responsibility towards each other in order to maintain peace and security. Economic inequalities challenge that equilibrium. Rich nations seek increased growth in capital markets while poor nations are saddled with more and more debt. Wealthy societies have a moral obligation to address those inequalities. They also should provide aid and assistance when poorer countries face internal strife and natural disasters.

Throughout history, the Church has made care for the poor a priority. We Christians have a duty to share in a love for the poor. We should shun the love of money for its own sake. Instead, we should care for those less fortunate because they represent the face of Christ.

Jesus said:

I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I had few clothes and you gave me more. I was sick and you visited me to see if you could help. I was under arrest and you came to see me.

Matthew 25:35-36

On the surface, the Seventh Commandment seems to address the question of rightful possession. But it involves much more than the ownership of goods. It implicitly extends to questions of justice and charity. We not only have possessions we have a moral obligation to use them for the good of all. This duty extends to our families, our community and our nation. How we use what we have speaks to our character and our faith.

Closing Question:

How have you used your possessions for the good of others?

Reference to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Paragraphs CCC 2401-2463.

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