

TO AVOID LUST.

CATHOLIC ANECDOTES

CHAPTER X.

NINTH COMMANDMENT OF GOD.

You Shall not Covet Your Neighbour's Wife.

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379. *A Twenty Years' Torment.* -

When you happen, my dear friends, to be tempted by the devil, when he seeks to inspire you with bad thoughts, not only must you avoid dwelling upon it, but my advice is that you must even mention it to your confessor the first opportunity you have of doing so: nothing annoys the devil more than that. The celebrated Gerson, Chancellor of the University of Paris in the fourteenth century, relates that a poor solitary was tormented in this way long and violently, but without daring to acquaint his director of his trouble. "I am lost!" said he to himself; "it is frightful to have such bad thoughts; if I tell my spiritual father he will be scandalized, and will have a very bad opinion of me" Nevertheless, after having borne these interior torments for full twenty years, he resolved to speak of them to an old Father of the desert, in whom he had great confidence; he dared not even tell him by word of mouth, and wrote what he had to say on a piece of papyrus. The holy old man, having read it, began to smile and said to

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him: "My son, place your hand on my head. Now, (and the solitary having done so,) I take your sin upon myself, so trouble yourself no more about it." -- "How, Father?" asked the solitary, much surprised at these words, "it seems to me that I have already one foot in hell, and you tell me not to trouble myself about it." -- "But, son," said the old man, "do you take pleasure in these thoughts?" -- "On the contrary, Father, they have always given me great sorrow and much pain." -- "That being the case," replied the man of God, "it is a proof that you did not consent to them, and that it was the devil who excited them in you in order to make you despair. Therefore, son, take my advice, and if any such thoughts again recur to you, say to the devil, who is the author of them: 'Woe to you, spirit of pride and impurity; on your head be your abominations and your blasphemies! I will have nothing to do with you; I hold to what the Church believes, and I would die a thousand times rather than offend God.'" These words of the holy old man so consoled and strengthened the solitary, that he was never again attacked by the thoughts that had so long tormented him.

- RODRIGUEZ, *Christian Perfection*, IV., 88.

380. *The Two Tempting Devils.* -

The devil may well suggest bad thoughts to us, my dear friends, but he cannot make us consent to them.

The Abbe Smaragde relates a circumstance in this connection which may be useful, although it is not very authentic. He says that a monk had a vision one day. It seemed

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to him that he saw two demons speaking together, and asking each other concerning the progress they were respectively making, with two persons whom they had been trying to tempt. One said "I am doing very well with him that I have to deal with. I have only to present a bad thought to him, and immediately he takes to it and dwells upon it; when he finds himself surprised by that thought, he turns over in his mind all the ground it has gained there; he amuses himself with examining how far he dwelt upon it, whether it was his own fault, whether he resisted, or consented, how it could have come into his mind, if he gave occasion to it, or if he did all that he ought to have done to give none; in short, as often as I please, I torture his mind in this way, and put him almost beside himself." - "For me," said the other demon, "I am losing time with him that I am tempting. As soon as I suggest a bad thought to him, he immediately has recourse to God, or the Blessed Virgin, or some Saint, or else he turns his mind to something else; so, I know not where to take him." By this you may see, my friends, that the devil is very glad when we amuse ourselves reasoning on a bad temptation which he has suggested to us; for, then, he lacks neither will, nor address to make it pass from our mind to our heart. On the contrary, a good way to resist it is, not even to want to listen to it, and not to make head against it, but immediately to turn the mind away from it, without paying any attention to it. Act in this way, then,

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dear friends, since it is the only way of remaining victorious.

- RODRIGUEZ, *Christian Perfection*, IV., 95.

381 *St. Benedict Rolling Himself in Thorns.* -

The holy virtue of modesty is so precious that it is called the virtue of angels; hence some of the saints were seen to do extraordinary things in order to preserve it pure and untouched. Of this number was St. Benedict, patriarch of the Monks of the West. When he was only sixteen years of age, he quitted the world, and retired to a small desert, named Sublac (or Subiaco), situated within a short distance of Rome. There he shut himself up in a cave and lived three years in absolute solitude and in extraordinary austerities. Well! my friends, notwithstanding all these precautions, the devil still found means to tempt him against the Sixth Commandment, recalling to his mind the remembrance of certain things he had seen in his early youth. The holy young man resisted this evil temptation with all the energy of which he was capable; but, seeing that it still continued to torment him, he took a most extraordinary resolution in order to drive it away: he availed himself of the darkness of night to lie down on thorns and briars, and to roll himself thereon so long as the temptation continued. He was well rewarded for his generous resolution, for not only did these vile thoughts quit him entirely, but God gave him the grace never to have any more all the rest of his life. It was he himself who confessed it to his disciples, in his latter years, and we have

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these details from St. Gregory the Great.

- ST. GREGORY THE GREAT, *Dialogues*, Chapter II.

382. *How a Temptation is Put to Flight.* -

Those who are cowardly and pusillanimous succeed in nothing; we must arm ourselves with courage and resolution if we would surmount the obstacles opposed to our salvation. Hence it was said by Job, my young friends, that *the life of man upon earth is a warfare*. I have read, in the life of St. Thomas Aquinas, one of the most learned doctors of the Church, a fact that goes to prove what I say. From his earliest years, and especially at the period of his first communion, he formed the project of entering the Order of St. Dominic.

His brothers, instead of admiring his resolution and encouraging him in it, regarded it as a sort of dishonour for them, and sought by every possible means to dissuade him from it. They went so far as to shut him up in a tower of the castle of Rocca-Sicca, in the diocese of Acquinas, in the kingdom of Naples, and to impose upon him the hardest privations in order to conquer his resolution. But as all that did not succeed, they allowed themselves to be inspired by the spirit of evil, and openly attacked the virtue of St. Thomas Aquinas. They promised a great sum of money to a wicked woman, if she succeeded in seducing and overcoming him. This unhappy woman presents herself before him and dares to address him in the language of unbridled passion a

language of mere sensuality but without an iota of divine and uplifting love.

The young champion understood that, in a combat of open force, like that, it would be but losing time

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to attempt reasoning. What does he do? He takes a burning coal from the hearth, and begins to pursue the woman, crying: "Robbers! robbers!" You should have seen how she went down stairs, four steps at a time, and how quickly she disappeared from the castle! That was all St. Thomas wanted. When his brothers saw that their wicked persecutions, instead of subduing, did but strengthen him in his generous resolution, they let him alone, and he entered, as I told you, the Order of Dominicans rendered illustrious by so many holy doctors.

- *Life of St. Thomas Aquinas.*

383. *A Tempted Man's Reliquaire.* -

I am sure you all wear on your necks, my young friends, either a scapular, a cross, or a blessed medal. These pious objects, when they are worn with faith and with respect, draw down graces upon us and help us to practise virtue. I have read a charming story of that kind, which is related by Cesaire, a writer of the Middle Ages. He had it from the very person to whom the circumstance occurred, and who was a monk of the Order of Citeaux, named Bernard, This man, whilst still very young, going alone one day on a journey, was assailed by some bad thoughts. As he did not take much care then, because he was still young in the world, he made no great efforts to drive them away or resist the temptation. It happened, however, that a little reliquaire (or reliquary pendant), which he was accustomed to wear hanging from his neck, and in which there were relics of St. John and St Paul,

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began to tap him gently on the chest. At first Bernard could not make out what this meant, or it might be that he paid no attention to it, and he continued to occupy himself with the same thoughts, till meeting a drove of oxen, his mind was diverted from them. Then the strokes of the reliquaire ceased entirely. A little while after, the temptation having attacked him again, the holy relics likewise commenced tapping him, as if warning him to drive away those bad thoughts very quickly. It was then that he understood the meaning of the taps they so frequently gave him, and, with God's grace, he courageously surmounted the temptation, and took care not to dwell on evil thoughts again.

- RODRIGUEZ, *Christian Perfection*, II., 27.