

THE SERMONS OF SAINT JOHN MARY VIANNEY.

Part Four: On the Tongue.

By Saint John Mary Vianney.

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{Saint John Vianney preached this series of Sermons to his parishioners in the rural hamlet of Ars, France, in the middle of the nineteenth century. His audience was primarily of illiterate and sedentary farm workers who had long been deprived of the benefits of an effective evangelizing and Sacramental ministry from the Church.

{It is fitting, then, that the literate readers of these sermons should be familiar with the full import of the Church's teaching on these important matters.

{The following is the relevant extract from the definitive *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

THE SECOND COMMANDMENT.

You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. (*Exodus* 20:7; *Deuteronomy* 5:11.)

You have heard that it was said to the men of old, "You shall not swear falsely. . . . But I say to you, "Do not swear at all." (*Matthew* 5:33-34.)

I. THE NAME OF THE LORD IS HOLY.

2142 The second commandment *prescribes respect for the Lord's name*. Like the first commandment, it belongs to the virtue of religion and more particularly, it governs our use of speech in sacred matters.

2143 Among all the words of Revelation, there is one, which is unique: the revealed name of God. God confides his name to those who believe in him; he reveals himself to them in his personal mystery. The gift of a name belongs to the

order of trust and intimacy. "The Lord's name is holy." For this reason, man must not abuse it. He must keep it in mind in silent, loving adoration. He will not introduce it into his own speech except to bless, praise, and glorify it.

2144 Respect for his name is an expression of the respect owed to the mystery of God himself and to the whole sacred reality it evokes. The *sense of the sacred* is part of the virtue of religion:

Are these feelings of fear and awe Christian feelings or not? . . . I say this, then, which I think no one can reasonably dispute. They are the class of feelings we *should* have — yes, have to an intense degree — if we literally had the sight of Almighty God; therefore they are the class of feelings which we shall have, *if* we realize His presence. In proportion as we believe that He is present, we shall have them; and not to have them, is not to realize, not to believe that He is present. (Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons* Volume 2 London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1907, pages 21-22.)

2146 The second commandment *forbids the abuse of God's name*, that is, every improper use of the names of God, of Jesus Christ, but also of the Virgin Mary and all the saints.

2147 *Promises* made to others in God's name engage the divine honor, fidelity, truthfulness, and authority. They must be respected in justice. To be unfaithful to them is to misuse God's name and in some way to make God out to be a liar. (See *1 John* 1:10.)

2148 *Blasphemy* is directly opposed to the second commandment. It consists in uttering against God — inwardly or outwardly — words of hatred, reproach, or defiance; in speaking ill of God; in failing in respect toward him in one's speech; in misusing God's name. Saint James condemns those "who blaspheme that honorable name [of Jesus] by which you are called." (*James* 2:7.) The prohibition of blasphemy extends to language against Christ's Church, the saints, and sacred things. It is also blasphemous to make use of God's name to cover up criminal practices, to reduce peoples to servitude, to torture persons or put them to death. The misuse of God's name to commit a crime can provoke others to repudiate religion.

Blasphemy is contrary to the respect due God and his holy name. It is in itself a grave sin. (See the Code of Canon Law, canon 1369.)

2149 *Oaths*, which misuse God's name, though without the intention of blasphemy, show lack of respect for the Lord. The second commandment also forbids *magical use* of the divine name.

[God's] name is great when spoken with respect for the greatness of his majesty. God's name is holy when said with veneration and fear of offending him. (Saint Augustine.)

II. TAKING THE NAME OF THE LORD IN VAIN.

2150 The second commandment *forbids false oaths*. Taking an oath or swearing is to take God as witness to what one affirms. It is to invoke the divine truthfulness as a pledge of one's own truthfulness. An oath engages the Lord's name. "You shall fear the LORD your God; you shall serve him, and swear by his name." (*Deuteronomy* 6:13.)

2151 Rejection of false oaths is a duty toward God. As Creator and Lord, God is the norm of all truth. Human speech is either in accord with or in opposition to God who is Truth itself. When it is truthful and legitimate, an oath highlights the relationship of human speech with God's truth. A false oath calls on God to be witness to a lie.

2152 A person commits *perjury* when he makes a promise under oath with no intention of keeping it, or when after promising on oath, he does not keep it. Perjury is a grave lack of respect for the Lord of all speech. Pledging oneself by oath to commit an evil deed is contrary to the holiness of the divine name.

2153 In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus explained the second commandment: "You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.' But I say to you, 'Do not swear at all'. . . . Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from the evil one." (*Matthew* 5:33-34 and 37; and see *James* 5:12.) Jesus teaches that every oath involves a reference to God and that God's presence and his truth must be honored in all speech. Discretion in calling upon God is allied with a respectful awareness of his presence, which all our assertions either witness to or mock.

2154 Following Saint Paul, (see *2 Corinth* 1:23; *Galatians* 1:20) the tradition of the Church has understood Jesus' words as not excluding oaths made for grave and right reasons (for example, in court). "An oath, that is the invocation of the divine name as a witness to truth, cannot be taken unless in truth, in judgment, and in justice." (The Code of Canon Law, canon 1199, section 1.)

2155 The holiness of the divine name demands that we neither use it for trivial matters, nor take an oath which, on the basis of the circumstances, could be interpreted as approval of an authority unjustly requiring it. When an oath is required by illegitimate civil authorities, it may be refused. It must be refused when it is required for purposes contrary to the dignity of persons or to ecclesial communion.

2120 *Sacrilege* consists in profaning or treating unworthily the sacraments and other liturgical actions, as well as persons, things, or places consecrated to God. Sacrilege is a grave sin especially when committed against the Eucharist, for in this sacrament the true Body of Christ is made substantially present for us.

IN BRIEF

2160 "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth"!

2161 The second commandment enjoins respect for the Lord's name. The name of the Lord is holy.

2162 The second commandment forbids every improper use of God's name. Blasphemy is the use of the name of God, of Jesus Christ, of the Virgin Mary, and of the saints in an offensive way.

2163 False oaths call on God to be witness to a lie. Perjury is a grave offence against the Lord who is always faithful to his promises.

2164 "Do not swear whether by the Creator, or any creature, except truthfully, of necessity, and with reverence" (Saint Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, 38).

{With this solid background, let us now listen to the words of Saint John Vianney.}

ALL THAT YOU SAY OVER AND ABOVE THESE IS OF EVIL.

It is indeed surprising, my dear brethren, that God should have had to give us a commandment forbidding us to profane His sacred name. Can you imagine, my children, that Christians could so hand themselves over to the Devil as to allow him to make use of them for execrating God, Who is so good and so benevolent? Can you imagine that a tongue, which has been consecrated to God by holy Baptism, and so many times moistened by His adorable Blood, could be employed in vilifying its Creator? Would anyone be able to do that who truly believed that God had given him his tongue so that he might bless Him and sing His praises? You will agree with me that this is an abominable crime, one which would seem to urge God to overwhelm us with all sorts of evils and to abandon us to the Devil, whom we have been obeying with so much zeal.

It is a sin, which makes the hair stand on end in anyone who is not entirely lost to the Faith.

And yet, in spite of its enormity, its horror, its blackness, is there a more common sin than swearing, than the uttering of blasphemies, imprecations, and curses? Do we not all have the sorrow of hearing such language coming from the mouths of children who hardly know their 'Our Father', horrible words which are sufficient to draw down all sorts of evils upon a parish?

I am going to explain to you, my dear brethren, what is understood by swearing, blasphemy, profanities, imprecations, and curses. Try to sleep well during this period so that when the Day of Judgment comes, you will be found to have committed this evil without knowing what you were doing — though, of course, you will be damned because your ignorance will all be your own fault!

For you to understand the enormity of this sin, my brethren, it would be necessary for you to understand the enormity of the outrage which it does to God — a thing which no mortal can ever understand. No, my dear brethren, only the anger, the power and the wrath of God concentrated in the inferno of Hell can bring home to us the enormity of this sin. No, no, my children, let us not run this risk — there must be Hell for all eternity for this sin.

All I want to do is to make you understand the difference which exists between swearing, blasphemy, profanity, imprecations, curses, and coarse words. A great many people confuse these things and take one thing for the other, which is the reason why they almost never accuse themselves of the sins they should, why they lay themselves open to the danger of bad confessions and therefore of damnation.

The Second Commandment, which forbids us to use false and unnecessary oaths or to perjure ourselves, is expressed in the following words: “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.” This is as though God told us: I order you and command you to revere this name because it is holy and adorable. I forbid you to profane it by employing it to authorize falsehood, injustice, or even — without sufficient reason — the truth itself.

And Jesus Christ tells us not to swear in any way.

Profanity is abusive, vulgar or irreverent language.

I tell you that badly instructed people often confuse blasphemy with swearing. If things have gone wrong with him, a man may, in a moment of anger, or rather of fury, say: “God is not just to make me suffer. . . .”

Although by these words he has thus spoken profanely about God, he will confess his sin by saying: “Father, I accuse myself of swearing.”

Yet it is not an oath but a blasphemy, which he has uttered.

Someone is falsely accused of a fault, which he has not committed. To support his protestations he will say: “May I never see the face of God if I did it!”

This is not an oath but a horrible *imprecation*. {An imprecation is the uttering of a curse or a malediction.}

These are two sins, which are every bit as bad as swearing.

Another, who will have told his next-door neighbor that he is a thief, a scoundrel, will confess that he “has sworn at his neighbor.” This is not swearing; it is using insulting language.

Another will say foul and unseemly things and, in Confession, will accuse himself of “having spoken wrongly.” He is wrong; he must say that he has been uttering obscenities. (These are coarse words.)

My dear brethren, *this is what swearing is: it is calling upon God to witness what we say or promise*; and perjury is an oath which is false — that is to say, it is perjury to swear to what is not true.

The name of God is so holy, so great, and so adorable that the angels and the saints, Saint John tells us, say unceasingly in Heaven: “Holy, holy, holy, is the great God of hosts; may His holy name be blessed for ever and ever.” When the Blessed Virgin went to visit her cousin Elizabeth and the saintly woman said to her, “How happy you are to have been chosen to be the mother of God!” the Blessed Virgin replied to her: “He that is mighty has done great things to me, and holy is His name.”

We ought, you see, my dear brethren, to have a great respect for the name of God and pronounce it only with tremendous veneration and never in vain. Saint Thomas tells us that it is a serious sin to pronounce the name of God in vain, that it is not a sin like other sins. In other sins, the light nature of the matter diminishes the seriousness of and the malice in them, and quite often, what could be a mortal sin is only a venial one. For instance, larceny is a mortal sin, but if it is larceny of something very small, like a couple of pennies, then it will be a venial sin only. Anger and gluttony are mortal sins, but slight anger or a little gluttony are only venial sins. In regard to swearing, however, it is not the same thing at all; here the lighter the matter, the greater the profanity. The reason for this is that the lighter the matter, the greater is the irreverence, as if a person were to ask the king to serve as a witness to some trifle, which would be to make a fool of him and to belittle him. Almighty God tells us that anyone who swears by His name will be sternly punished.

We read in Holy Scripture that in the time of Moses there were two men, of whom one swore by the holy name of God. “He had blasphemed the name, and had cursed it.” (Leviticus 24:10-16.)

He was seized and brought before Moses, who asked God what should be done with him. The Lord told Moses to bring the man into a field and to command all those who had been witnesses of this blasphemy to put their hands upon his head and to stone him to death in order to do away with the blasphemer in the very midst of all his own people.

The Holy Scripture tells us again that whoever is accustomed to swearing, his house will be filled with iniquities and the curse will never leave the house until it has been destroyed. (Ecclesiasticus 23:10-12: ‘For as a slave daily put to the question, is never

without a blue mark: so every one that is swearing, and uttering the name, shall not be wholly pure from sin.' 'A man that swears much, shall be filled with iniquity, and a scourge shall not depart from his house.')

Our Lord Jesus Christ tells us in the Gospel not to swear by Heaven nor by earth because neither the one nor the other belongs to us. When you want to confirm something say: "That is," or "that is not." "Yes," or "no." "I did it," or "I did not do it." (*Matthew* 5:33-34 and 37.)

Everything you say over and above that comes from the Devil. Besides, anyone who is in the habit of swearing is a fiery, undisciplined sort of person, very much wrapped up in his own feelings and always ready to swear as well as to a lie as to the truth.

But, you may say to me, if I do not swear, no one will believe me.

You are wrong. People never believe someone who swears because swearing presupposes someone who has no religion, and a person without religion is not worthy of being believed. There are many people who do not know how to sell the smallest article without swearing, as if their oath guaranteed the quality of their merchandise. If people see a merchant who swears oaths while he is selling, they immediately think that he is a person of bad faith and that they must be on their guard against being cheated. His oaths provoke only disgust and no one believes him. On the contrary, a person who does not swear adds good faith to what he is telling us.

We read in history of an example reported by Cardinal [Saint Robert] Bellarmine, who showed us that oaths achieve nothing. There were, he tells us, two merchants in Cologne who seemed to be able to sell nothing without swearing. Their pastor strongly urged them to give up this bad habit, for, far from losing, they would gain much by doing so. They followed his counsel. However, for a while they did not sell very much. They went to find their pastor, telling him that they were not selling as much as he had given them to hope that they would. Their pastor said to them: "Have patience, my children, you may be quite sure that God will bless you."

In fact, at the end of a certain time, they were doing so very well that one might have thought, from the crowds that came to them, that they were giving their goods away. They themselves then saw that God had indeed blessed them in a very special way.

The same Cardinal tells us that there was a good mother of a family who was very much in the habit of swearing. By dint of being persuaded that these oaths were unseemly in a mother and could but draw down curses upon her household, she was induced to correct this habit. She declared that since giving up this bad habit she had seen for herself that everything had gone well for her and that God had blessed her in a special manner.

Would you, my dear brethren, desire to be happy during your lives and to have God bless your homes? Take care, then, never to swear, and you will see that all will go well with you.

God tells us that on the house wherein swearing holds sway the curse of the Lord will fall and that it will be destroyed. So why, my dear brethren, do you allow yourselves to

fall into this evil way of behaving when God forbids it under the pain of making us unhappy in this world and of damning us in the next? Alas, if we would but understand in some small way what it is that we are doing! We will understand it — but then it will be too late.

In the second place, I say that there is an even worse form of swearing. This occurs when to the oath there are added such execrations as would make you tremble with fear. Thus, there are those unfortunate people who will say: “If what I am saying is not true, may I never see the face of God!”

Ah, unfortunate wretch, you are taking but too great a risk of never seeing it! “If it is not true, may I lose my place in Heaven! May God damn me! May the Devil carry me off! . . .”

Alas, for you, my friend, hardened in this habit! The Devil will only too surely carry you off without your giving yourself to him so far in advance. How many others are there who invariably have the Devil ready on their tongues at the least annoyance: “Oh, this child is a devil This devil of a beast This devilish work I wish it were obliterated, it drives me so mad!”

It is to be greatly feared that the person who has the Devil so often on his lips has him in his heart also! Then how many others are forever saying such things as: “On my soul, yes. . . . On my faith, no. . . . By Heaven!”

Or again:

“Oh, God, yes!”

“Oh, God, no! So help me. . . .”

There is another kind of swearing and of cursing to which people give little thought — these are the oaths which are uttered by the heart. There are those who believe that because they are not actually said by the mouth, there is no harm in them. You are greatly mistaken in that, my friends. It may happen that someone does some damage to your land, or elsewhere, and you swear at him in your heart and curse him inwardly, saying: “May the Devil make away with him! May the elements destroy him! May his food poison him!”

And you keep these thoughts in your heart for any length of time and you think that because you do not actually say them with your lips there is no harm in them. My good friends, this is a very serious sin, and you must confess it or you will be lost.

Alas, how few people know the state of their poor souls and how they appear in the eyes of God!

In the third place, we say that there are others even more guilty of this sin who swear, not only in respect of things which are true, but even in respect of things which are false. If you could understand how greatly your impiety and blasphemy insults God, you

would never have the courage to commit this sin. You behave towards God, as would the humblest slave who should say to the king:

“Sire, you must serve me as a false witness.”

Does not that fill you with horror, my dear brethren? God says to us in Holy Scripture: ‘Be holy because I am holy’. Do not lie and do not cheat or wrong your neighbor, and do not perjure yourselves by taking the name of the Lord your God for a witness to a lie, and do not profane the name of the Lord.

Saint John Chrysostom tells us: If it is already a great crime to swear to something true, what is the enormity of the crime of the man who swears falsely to confirm a lie? The Holy Ghost tells us that he who utters lies will perish. The Prophet Zacharias assures us that the curse will come to the house of the person who swears to confirm a lie and that it will remain thereon until that house is overthrown and destroyed. (Zechariah 5:3-4) Saint Augustine tells us that perjury is a fearful crime and a ferocious beast, which creates appalling havoc. And what about the people who even add to this sin? For there are those who will couple with their perjury an oath of execration by saying such things as: “If that is not true, may I never see the face of God! May God damn me! May the Devil make away with me!”

Unhappy creatures! If the good God were to take you at your word, where would you be? For how many years already would you have been burning in the flames of Hell? Tell me, my children, can you really imagine that a Christian could deliberately be guilty of such a crime, of such horror? No, my dear brethren, no, it is inconceivable conduct on the part of a Christian.

You must examine your consciences as to whether you have had the determination to swear or to take a false oath and how many times you have had this thought — that is to say, how many times you have been disposed to do it. A great number of Christians do not give even a thought to this, although it is a serious sin.

Yes, you will say to me, I thought of it, but then I did not do it. But your heart did it, and since you were in the disposition to do it, you were guilty in the eyes of God. Alas, poor religion how little is known of you!

We encounter in history a striking example of the punishment of those who swear false oaths. In the time of Saint Narcissus, Bishop of Jerusalem, three young libertines, who were abandoned to impurity, horribly calumniated their holy bishop, accusing him of crimes of which they themselves were guilty.

They went before the judges and said that their bishop had committed such and such a sin, and they confirmed their testimony with the most appalling oaths.

The first said: “If I am not speaking the truth, let me be smothered.”

The second: “If that is not true, I would be burned alive.”

The third: “If that is not true, let me lose my eyes.”

The justice of God was not slow in punishing them. The first was smothered and died horribly. In the case of the second, his house was set on fire by a burning brand from a bonfire in the town, and he was burned alive. The third, although he was punished, was happier than the others: he recognized his sin, did penance for it, and wept so much that he lost his sight.

Here is another example, which is no less striking. We read in the history of the reign of Saint Edward, King of England, that the Count Gondevin (or Godwin), who was the king’s father-in-law, was so jealous and so proud that he could not get along with anyone in the king’s court. One day the King accused him of having had a hand in his brother’s death.

“If that is so,” replied the Count, “may this piece of bread choke me!”

With an open mind, the King took the piece of bread and made the Sign of the Cross over it. The other tried to eat the bread, but it stuck in his throat and choked him, and he died on the spot.

You will agree with me, my dear brethren, after hearing these terrifying examples, that this sin must be very dreadful in the eyes of God for Him to want to punish it in so terrible a way.

Yet there are fathers and mothers, masters and mistresses, who at every moment of the day have these words on their lips: “Oh, what a dirty little swine! . . . Ah, you little beast! . . . Oh, you fool! . . . I wish you’d die here and now, you annoy me so much! . . . You couldn’t be far enough away from me for my liking! . . . You’ll have a lot to answer for! . . .”

(And, while I think of it, being foul-mouthed has a very close connection with cursing, too. It isn’t cursing, as such; but it is the use of *coarse words* and is unfitting from the mouths of baptized children of God.) Yes, my dear brethren, there are parents who have so little religion that such words are always on their lips. Alas, how many poor children are weak and feeble of soul, sour — vicious even — as a result of the curses that their fathers and mothers laid upon them!

We read in history that there was a mother who said to her child: “I wish you were dead, you are annoying me so much.”

This unfortunate child fell dead at her feet.

Another mother said to her son: “May the Devil take you!”

The child disappeared without anyone knowing where he had gone or what had become of him.

Dear God, what tragedy! Tragedy for the child and for the mother!

There once lived a man well respected for his steady living who, returning one day from a journey, called his servant in a very offhand manner, saying to him:

“Here, you, you old devil of a valet! Come and get my boots off!”

Immediately his boots began to draw themselves off without anyone touching them.

He was absolutely terrified and started to cry out: “Go away, Satan! It wasn’t you I called, but my valet!”

So much did he cry out that the Devil fled there and then and his boots stayed half pulled off. This instance shows us, my dear brethren, how closely the Devil hovers around us, waiting to cheat us and cause us to lose our souls whenever the opportunity presents itself.

It was for this reason that, as we see, the first Christians had such a horror of the Devil that they did not even dare to pronounce his name. You should take great care, then, never to say it yourself and never to allow your children or your servants to say it either. If you do hear them saying it, you must reprove them until you see that they have given up the habit altogether.

Now, my dear children, it is not only an evil thing to swear oneself, but it is also very wrong to make others swear (without a truly necessary and justified reason).

Saint Augustine tells us that anyone who is the cause of another’s swearing falsely in law is more guilty than someone who commits homicide because, he says, whoever kills a man kills his body only, whereas anyone who makes another swear falsely in law kills his soul. (He is referring to those who pay off witnesses to perjure themselves against the truth.) To give you an idea of the seriousness of this sin, I am going to show how guilty anyone is who foresees that people he intends to bring to law are going to perjure themselves. (Remember, God has given each of us free will. We should never abuse this gift, no matter what the provocation, by deliberately choosing to embrace a lie or any other sin.)

We read in history that there was a citizen of the town of Hippo, a man of some standing, but a little too attached to the things of this world. He decided to force a man who was in his debt to go to law. (He was impatient for his money and was not prepared to wait another season to reclaim his debt from his poor tenant farmer.) This wretch swore falsely, or in other words, he declared on oath that he owed nothing. The following night, the man who had forced the law suit in order that he might be paid was himself brought before a tribunal where he saw a judge who spoke to him in a terrible and threatening voice and demanded to know why he had caused a man to perjure himself, why he should not have preferred to lose whatever was owed to him than to damn a soul. He was

told, however, that since he had been given grace on this occasion, because of his works, he would be condemned to be beaten with rods. The following day his body was indeed covered with blood. What terrible punishment awaited the perjurer, God alone knows.)

But, you may say to me, if we do not force people to swear in law, we shall lose our debts. Nonsense!

But would you rather lose someone's soul — and your own — than lose your money? Besides, my dear brethren, you may be very sure that if you make a sacrifice, in order not to offend God, He will not fail to recompense you in some other way.

Meanwhile, this does not very often happen, but you must be on your guard against giving presents to or canvassing people, who are to testify against you in law, not to speak the truth; that way you would damn them and yourselves. If you have done that and someone has had a wrong judgment given against him because of your falsehood, you would be obliged to repair all the harm that has been done and to compensate the person concerned, whether in his pocket or in his reputation, and to the fullest extent that you possibly can; otherwise you will be damned. You must also contemplate whether you have even considered swearing falsely and how many times you have entertained such a thought. There are some, who believe that because they have said nothing, they have not, therefore, done any harm. My good friends, although you did not actually say anything, you committed a sin, since you were disposed to do the wrong. Consider, too, whether you have not ever given bad advice to others on this sort of matter.

Someone says to you: "I think I am going to be brought to court by So-and-So. What do you think about it?"

"I have a great mind not to say what I saw, so that he may not lose the action; the other has more than enough to pay the costs.

"And yet at the same time I am doing something wrong."

You say to him: "Ah, yes, but the wrong is not very great.

". . . . You would make him lose too much. . . ."

If after that, he perjures himself, and he himself has not enough to compensate the injured party, you are bound, because it was on your advice that the injury was done, to make the restitution yourself.

Never do a wrong to another just because you believe the other seems wealthier than yourself, and because you have convinced yourself that he can afford the loss.

Would you, my dear brethren, know what to do, both in law and in other affairs? Listen to Jesus Christ Himself when He tells us: "And if a man will contend with you in the judgment, and take away your coat, let go your cloak also unto him," for that is more advantageous than going to law.

Alas, that the machinery of justice should be the cause of the commission of sin! How many souls indeed are damned by such false oaths, by hatreds, by cheating, and by vengeance!

But think of those oaths, my dear brethren, which are most frequently uttered — which are uttered, indeed, at every hour of the day. If we tell something to someone and he does not believe us, we must needs swear to our statement with an oath.

Fathers and mothers, masters and mistresses, should be on their guard against this. It often happens that children or servants have committed some fault and they are urged to admit it. Both children and servants may have a fear of being smacked or rebuked, so they will swear any number of times that what is alleged is not true, “may they never stir from that place if it is,” and so on. It would be much more praiseworthy for those in authority to say nothing and to suffer any loss rather than make their subordinates damn themselves. Besides, where does that kind of thing get you? You all offend God, and you have nothing to show for it. What regret you would have, my dear brethren, if on the Day of Judgment you saw those souls damned because of some trifle or passing vanity of yours. Encourage your children and your servants to abandon this habit of unnecessarily swearing, when questioned about their actions. If they have indeed done something wrong, let them be made aware of the fault, but let them also see that you are a Christian and are anxious to follow the example of God the All-loving and All-merciful Father of us all.

There are still others who swear or promise to do something or to give something to another without having the slightest intention of doing or giving it. Before they promise something, they had better consider whether they will be able to fulfill it.

You should never say, before promising something, “If I don’t do that now, may I never see God May I never stir from this place.”

Take care, my brethren! These sins are more horrible than you will ever understand. If, for example, during a fit of anger, you vowed to be revenged, it is quite clear that not only should you not do such a thing but that, on the contrary, you should ask pardon from God for having such a thought. The Holy Ghost tells us that anyone who swears will be punished. . . .

Now, you may ask me, what is to be understood by that word blasphemy? This, my dear children, is so horrible a sin that it would not seem possible that Christians should ever have the courage to commit it.

Blasphemy is a word, which connotes the hating and cursing of infinite beauty, which explains why this sin directly attacks God.

Saint Augustine tells us: “We blaspheme when we attribute to God anything which is not an attribute of God or which is not in keeping with Him, or if we dare to take from what would be in keeping with Him, or, finally, if we attribute to ourselves that which is in

keeping with God and which belongs to Him alone.”

I tell you, therefore, that we blaspheme:

1.

When we say that God is not just in making some people so rich that they have everything in abundance while so many others are so wretched that they have difficulty in getting bread to eat.

2.

When we say that He is not as good as people say, since He allows so many people to remain weak and despised by others while there are some who are loved and respected by everyone.

3.

Or if we say that God does not see everything, that He does not know what is going on in the world.

4.

If we say: “If God shows mercy to So-and-So, He is not just because that man has done too much harm.”

5.

Or again, when we come up against some loss or setback and we lose our temper with God and say such things as: “Ah, but I certainly have bad luck! God cannot do any more to me! I believe that He does not even know I am in the world, or if He does know, it is only so that He can make me suffer!”

It is also blasphemy to criticize the Blessed Virgin and the Saints by saying such things as: “That one has not much power! I don’t know how many prayers I have said to him (or her), and I have never got anything.”

Saint Thomas tells us that blasphemy is an insulting and outrageous utterance against God or the saints. This may be done in four ways:

1.

By affirmation, as when we say: “God is cruel and unjust to allow me to suffer so many wrongs, to allow anyone to calumniate me like that, to allow me to lose that money or this lawsuit. I am very unfortunate! Everything is going wrong with me. I cannot have anything, while everything is going well with other people.”

2.

It is blasphemy to say that God is not all-powerful and that one can do anything without Him.

It was blasphemy for Sennacherib, the King of the Assyrians, to besiege the town of Jerusalem, saying that in spite of God he would take the town.

He mocked at God, saying that He was not powerful enough to stop him from

entering the town and putting it to fire and the sword. But God, in order to punish this wretched man and to show him that He was indeed all-powerful, sent an angel who in one single night killed one hundred and eighty thousand of his men. On the following morning, when the King saw his army massacred and did not know by whom, he was terrified and fled to Nineveh, where he himself was killed by his own two children.

3.

It is blasphemy to bestow upon some creature that which is due God alone, like those unhappy creatures who will say to some sinful creature, who is the object of their passions: "I love you with all the fervor of my heart. . . . I worship you. . . . I adore you." This is a sin, which provokes horror, and yet is at least common enough in practice.

4.

It is horrible blasphemy to damn something in the name of God.

This sin of blasphemy is so great and so hideous in the eyes of God that it draws down all sorts of evils upon the world. The Jews had such a horror of blasphemies that when they heard anyone blaspheming, they rent their garments. They did not dare even to pronounce the word but called it "Benediction."

The holy man Job had such fear that his children had blasphemed that he offered sacrifices to God in case they had. . . .

Saint Augustine says that those who blaspheme Jesus Christ in Heaven are more cruel than those who crucified Him on earth.

The bad thief blasphemed Jesus Christ when He was on the Cross, saying: "If You be Christ, save Yourself and us." The Prophet Nathan said to King David: "Because you have given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, for this thing, the child that is born to you shall surely die."

God tells us that whoever blasphemes the name of the Lord shall die.

We read in Holy Scripture (as I've mentioned) that the people brought a man to Moses who had blasphemed. Moses consulted the Lord, who told him that he must have the man brought to a field and put to death, that is to say, stoned to death. (Leviticus 24:10-16.)

We can say that blasphemy is truly the language of Hell. Saint Louis, King of France, had such a horror of this sin that he ordained that all blasphemers should be branded on the forehead. An important person from Paris, who had blasphemed, was brought to the King and several people interceded for him, but the King said that he would die himself in order to wipe out this dreadful sin, and he ordered that the man should be punished.

The tongues of those who were wicked enough to commit this crime were cut out by

order of the Emperor Justin.

During the reign of Robert (the Pious), the kingdom of France was overwhelmed by all kinds of evils, and God revealed to a Saint that while the blasphemies continued, the chastisements would continue, too. A law was enacted which condemned all those who blasphemed to have their tongues pierced with a red-hot iron for the first offence and ordered that on the second offence they should be executed.

Be warned, my dear brethren, that if blasphemy reigns in your homes, all therein will perish.

Saint Augustine tells us that blasphemy is an even greater sin than perjury because, as he says, by perjury we take the name of God in witness of something which is false, whereas in blasphemy we are saying something false of God. What a crime is this! And who amongst us has ever fully understood it?

Saint Thomas, again, tells us that there is another kind of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, which can be committed in three ways:

1. By attributing to the Devil the works of Almighty God, as did the Jews when they said that Jesus Christ drove out devils in the name of the prince of devils, as did the tyrants and persecutors who attributed to the Devil and to magic the miracles performed by the saints.
2. It is blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, Saint Augustine tells us, to die in final impenitence. Impenitence is a spirit of blasphemy, since the remission of our sins is achieved through love, which is the Holy Ghost.
3. We blaspheme when we perform actions, which are directly opposed to the goodness of God — as when we despair of our salvation and yet are not willing to take the necessary steps to obtain it; as when we are angered because others receive more graces than we do.

Take great care never to allow yourselves to fall into these kinds of sins because they are so very horrible! In this way, we look upon Almighty God as unjust because He gives more to others than He does to us.

Have you never blasphemed, my dear brethren, by saying that Providence is only for the rich and the wicked? If something went wrong with your affairs, have you not blasphemed by saying: “But what did I do to God more than anyone else that I should have so much to put up with?”

What have you done, my friend? Lift up your eyes and you will see Him whom you have crucified. Have you not blasphemed, also, by saying that you were tempted beyond measure, that you could not do otherwise, that this was your lot?

Well, my dear brethren, did you never think along these lines?

. . . . So it is God who would have had you vicious, bad tempered, violent fornicators, adulterers, blasphemers! You do not believe in Original Sin, which dragged men down from the state of uprightness and justice in which we were all at first created!

It is stronger than you are, you say. . . . But, my friends, did religion never come, then, to your aid to help you to understand all the corruption of Original Sin? And yet, you dare, wretched sinner, to blaspheme against Him Who gave religion to you as the greatest gift which He could make you! Have you not also blasphemed against the Blessed Virgin and the saints? Have you not laughed at their virtues, at their penances and their miracles? Alas! In this evil century how many impious people do we not find who carry their impiety to the point of actually scoffing at the Saints, who are in Heaven, and the just, who are on earth? How many are there who make fun of the austerities which the Saints practiced and who neither wish to serve God themselves nor tolerate that anyone else should serve Him either? Look again, my dear brethren, and see if you have uttered your swearing and your blasphemy to children. Unhappy people, what chastisements await you in the next life!

What is the difference, you may ask me, between blasphemy and the repudiation of God? There is a very big difference, my dear brethren, between blasphemies and repudiations of God.

Now in speaking about repudiation, I do not want to talk about those people who repudiate God by abandoning the true religion. We call such people renegades or apostates. But I do want to talk about those people who, when they are speaking, have the dreadful habit, whether in sudden vexation or real passion, of attacking the holy name of God. For example, someone who has lost on a sale or on a gamble will inveigh against God as if he wanted to convince himself that God was the cause of his misfortune. If something happens to you, it seems that God should bear the brunt of all the fury of your resentment, as if God were the cause of your loss or of the accident which befell you.

Unhappy sinner! He Who created you from nothing, Who preserves you, and Who fills you continually with blessings and gifts — it is He whom you dare just the same to mock, to profane His holy name and to repudiate, while He, if He had been swayed solely by His justice, would long ago have consigned you to the flames of Hell.

We see that anyone who has the misfortune to commit these very grave sins usually comes to a bad end.

There is an account of a man who was very ill and reduced to dire want. A missionary went to his home to see him and to hear his Confession, and to him the sick man said: “Father, God is punishing my outbursts of anger and rages, my blasphemies, and my repudiations of Him. I have been ill for quite a long time. I am very poor; all my wealth has come to a bad end. My children despise and abandon me; they are worthless because

of the bad example I have given them. Already now, for quite some time I have been suffering, lying here on this wretched bed. My tongue is all diseased and I cannot swallow anything without experiencing terrible agony. Alas, Father, I am very much afraid that after all this suffering in this world, I will still have to suffer in the next.”

We see even in our own day that all those people who swear and profane the holy name of God almost always come to bad ends. Take good heed, my dear brethren, if you have this evil habit. You had better correct it, for fear that if you do not do penance for it in this world, you will be doing it in Hell.

Never lose sight of the fact that your tongue should be employed in praying to God and in singing His praises. If you have the evil habit of swearing, you should often, in order to purify your lips, say the holy name of Jesus with great respect.

Now perhaps you will ask me what is understood by *cursing* and the uttering of imprecations. It means, my dear brethren, cursing a person or a thing or an animal in moments of anger or despair. It is wishing to destroy him or to make him suffer. The Holy Ghost tells us that the person who has the ready curse in his mouth should greatly fear, lest God should grant him what he desires. There are some who have the Devil always on their tongues, who consign to him everything which annoys them.

When they are at work, if an animal does not go the way they want it to, they will curse it and consign it to the Devil. There are others who, when the weather or the children do not behave as they would wish, call down maledictions upon one or the other. . . . Do not ever forget that the Holy Ghost tells us that a curse uttered irresponsibly or carelessly will fall upon someone (especially the curser himself).

Saint Thomas tells us that if we utter a curse against someone, the sin is mortal if we desire whatever it is we say to happen to that person. Saint Augustine tells us that a mother cursed her children — there were seven of them. They were all possessed by the Devil. Many children, who have been cursed by their parents, have been delicate and wretched throughout their lives.

We read that there was once a mother whose daughter had put her into such a temper that she cried out:

“I wish your arm would wither on you!”

In fact, this child’s arm did wither, almost immediately.

Married people should take great care never to utter these dreadful sayings to each other. There are some who, if they are unhappy in their homes, will curse their wives, their children, their parents, and all who in any way have any part in the marriage. Alas, my friends, the whole source of your unhappiness lies in yourself because you entered into marriage with a conscience quite steeped in sin. Think about that before Almighty God, and you will see that it is, in fact, the truth. Workers should never curse their work or

those who make them work.

Besides, in any event, your imprecations will not make your affairs go any the better. On the contrary, if you have some patience, if you know how to offer up all your difficulties to God, you will bring yourself much nearer to Heaven.

Have you not also cursed the tools, which serve you in your work, invoking maledictions upon them, your animals, and so on? That is the sort of thing, my dear brethren, which draws down all sorts of evils upon your animals, upon your labours, and upon your lands, which are often ravaged by hailstorms, by drenching rains, and by frosts. Have you not indeed cursed yourselves: "Ah! I wish I had never seen the light of day. . . . I wish I had been born dead. . . . I wish I were back in oblivion."

Alas! These are terrible sins, and quite a large number of people never accuse themselves of them in Confession or ever think about them. I will tell you yet again that you must never curse your children, your animals, your work, or the weather because in cursing all these things, you are cursing what Almighty God does by His holy will. Children should take care never to give occasion to their parents to curse them, which is the greatest of all evils. Often a child who is cursed by his parents is cursed by Almighty God.

When someone has done something to you which has angered you very much, now instead of wishing him to the Devil, you would do far more good by saying to him: "May God bless you!" Then you would be a genuinely good servant of God who returns good for evil.

In connection with this Commandment, there yet remains to be said something in the matter of the vows, which people make. You should be very careful never to make vows without taking proper counsel beforehand. There are some people who, when they are ill, dedicate themselves to all the saints and then later on do not go to the trouble to fulfill their promises. You should also be careful that you make these vows properly, that is to say, while you are in a state of grace. What a number of sins are committed in the matter of these vows! And the whole business, instead of pleasing God, can only offend Him!

If you were to ask me why it is that there are nowadays so many who swear, who take false oaths, who utter frightful curses and imprecations and repudiate God, I would reply that these same people, who give themselves up to such horrible practices, are those who have neither faith, nor religion, nor conscience, nor virtue. These are the people who, to a certain extent, are abandoned by God.

How much happier we should be if we had the good fortune to employ our tongues, which have been consecrated to God by holy Baptism, solely in prayer to God, Who is so good, so benevolent, and to sing His praises! Since it is for that purpose that God has given us a tongue, let us try, my dear brethren, to consecrate it to Him, so that after this

life we shall have the happiness of going to Heaven to bless Him for all eternity. This is what I desire for you.
