

CHAPTER I

On Duties Which Must Be Accomplished

Translated From The French By MRS. J. Sadlier.
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COMMANDMENTS OF GOD IN GENERAL.

194. Promulgation of the Law of God on Mount Sinai. - Do you remember, my dear children, the manner in which your Sacred History relates the proclamation of the law of God on Mount Sinai, in the Arabian desert? There is a holy Monastery there today. the people surrounding it are nomadic Arabs governed by Egypt. On the day fixed for that solemn promulgation, all the people of Israel were encamped at the foot of the mountain, at a distance prescribed beforehand. No one was to cross the boundary marked by God himself. All at once, just as the light of the rising sun began to overspread the earth, the holy mountain was seen covered with a dense cloud, from the midst of which came forth lightning and thunder that struck the people with salutary fear and respect. To the pealing of the thunder was joined the sound of a trumpet, heard even at a great distance. The Lord, says the Scripture, manifested himself on the top of the mountain; He called Moses, who advanced alone with Aaron. Moses was ordered, nevertheless, to ascend higher than Aaron, and to enter without fear into the midst of the thunder and lightning that pealed over Sinai. The priests (that is the rest of Moses' tribe of Levi) and the entire people, men, women, and children, remained at a distance, but they clearly distinguished all that the Lord said to Moses. After that, it was then that He pronounced those beautiful words, which are the summary of his law and which are called the Decalogue or Ten Commandments of God: I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me, you shall not make to yourself graven images to adore and serve them, etc. You know these commandments by heart, my dear children, so it would be useless for me to repeat them at length. The principal thing is not to know them word by word, but to practise them to the letter, if we would be sharers in the magnificent rewards which God has attached to them. - Exodus, Chapters XIX. and XX.

195. Story of Little Nilus. - How happy you are, dear children, in having begun so early to serve God! Let me tell you on that subject what was done by a young man who afterwards became a great saint. He was called Nilus, and was born in Palestine, in the fifth century. He had received, like you, a Christian education, and distinguished himself in his studies. As he had much talent, and was of prepossessing appearance, false friends advised him to live in the world and enjoy the pleasures it affords. Nilus had the misfortune to follow their suggestions; little by little he forgot his good principles, formed bad connections, and finally became very corrupt. Nevertheless, the remembrance of his last end made him re-enter into himself, and he felt all the danger of his position. "I am lost," said he within himself, "I am lost if I continue in this unhappy state. Come! I must be converted; and to prove to God that I wish henceforward to love and serve Him with fidelity, I will consecrate myself to Him, either in the solitary life, or in the religious state." So Nilus quitted the world without a moment's delay, and set out for the desert. As he journeyed along, he

met a Saracen, as members of the nomadic Bedouin tribe was called, who abruptly accosted him, asking him who he was, whence he came, and whither he was going. The good young man simply told him his intention. "How!" said the barbarian, much astonished, "you would quit the world at your age! Why, with your appearance, and the wealth you possess, you are very wrong to consecrate yourself so young to your God. Were I in your place, I would wait till I was far advanced in years." - "What! you would have me wait till I was old and decrepit to be faithful to my God! Could such a sacrifice be acceptable to Him? One must, indeed, have no heart to treat him so unworthily. On the contrary, nothing is more pleasing to Him than the honour we pay Him in our youth; and hence it is that, grieved for having been so long unfaithful to Him, I hasten to give myself entirely to His service." The Saracen was so struck by this wise reflection that he admired the young Nilus, and was the first to encourage him to carry out his generous project - REYRE, *Anec. Chret.*, 64.

196. A Blameless Old Savage Indian of the Mississippi Valley. - Savages who know not God shall be saved, my friends, if they faithfully observe the natural law, that is to say, that which God has engraved on the heart of every human being. It is very easily told: "Do unto others as you would wish that others should do unto you." Two missionaries were travelling in North America; one of them, instead of following the usual way, felt himself inspired to plunge into a thick and almost impenetrable wood. His companion strove to persuade him that he was going astray, but he would not change his purpose, and both entered the wood, without knowing whither it led. After walking some time on a venture, they arrived at a cottage made of branches and trunks of trees. They entered. What was their surprise to find within a poor old man lying on dry leaves and almost dying! One of the missionaries asked him in the Indian language what was the matter with him, what he was doing there, and whether he knew the God that created him. "No," replied the good old man, "I do not know Him, but I would wish to know Him." - "It was He, then, who sent us to you that we may make Him known to you. But, tell me, have you not killed many men, like all the other savages of your country?" - "I never killed any one; I would not wish that any one should take my life, so I must not take another's life." - "Have You not sometimes stolen a bow, or arrows, some clothes or provisions that belonged to some one else?" - "No, I have never stolen anything, because I would not that any one should steal from me." - "You have, perhaps, lied?" - "What is lying?" - "It is saying knowingly the contrary of what is." - "Then, I have never lied; when I question others, I wish that they should tell me the truth; I am therefore bound to do the same myself." The Father went over thus in review the principal points of the natural law, and he had the satisfaction of seeing that the good savage had never offended God, at least mortally. He instructed him, then, in the mysteries of our holy religion, and asked him if he wished to be baptized. "I do," said the old man, "I now await but that to die and go see the Great Spirit." He died, in fact, some days after, in great sentiments of fervour. - NOEL, *Cat. de Rodez*, VII., 210.

197. Father Bonaventure's Stories. - Those who violate the commandments of God, that is to say, those who commit sin, are never happy, my good young friends! If they sometimes prosper for a time it does not last long; and, even though they might be happy during their whole life, they shall be unhappy for all eternity. I remember having read in a little book entitled *A Little Memento of the Retreat*, the following story: An old labourer, who was commonly called father Bonaventure, was fond of sitting in the sun to recruit his strength exhausted by age. He was also fond of chatting, and relating former occurrences of which he had been the witness. It was a pleasure to hear him talk of the great Revolution, of Napoleon the First, whom he always called the Emperor, of the Russian campaign, and, finally, of the Allies, whom he always designated under the name of Cossacks. It was from this habit of telling stories that he came to be called father Bonaventure. One day, a dozen

or so of little children were frisking around him, prattling in childish glee, and amusing themselves with the noisy sports of their age. All at once the oldest amongst them cries out: "A story! a story! father Bonaventure, tell us a story!" And all the children repeat "That's it, - a story!" And they seat themselves in a circle round the old soldier of the Empire. "Children," said the good old man, "I am very old; see, I have scarcely a hair on my head. Well! during my long career, I have remarked five things; try to remember them, and you will be happy, I promise you, on the faith and word of an honest man: (1.) Working on Sunday never made any one the richer. (2.) Stolen or ill-gotten goods have never profited any one. (3.) Giving alms has never made any one poorer. (4.) Morning and evening prayers have never delayed work. (5.) A disobedient and unruly child has never prospered." And I, too, my dear children, will recommend to you these five things, and I promise you, in the name of God, happiness in this life and in the other, if you are really faithful to them. - G. S. G.

198. A Nobleman's Two Stewards. - Amongst the parables which I have read, the following, my young friends, appears to me of a nature to interest you. It is about a rich lord who had two stewards. Each of them rivalled the other in devotion to him, and knew not how to testify their love. They assured him, with the most solemn and sacred protestations, that their fidelity to him should never be found wanting. Nevertheless, wishing to try the sincerity of their zeal and devotion, this lord said one day: "I am about to set out on a long journey. During my absence, you shall watch carefully over my treasures. I give each of you a certain part to take care of. Be faithful and vigilant, and on my return, I will reward each of you according to your deserts." As soon as he was gone, they both resolved to obey his orders punctually. Each of them shut up in a little box the money he had received. A short time after the departure of their lord, there came three of his enemies who did all they could to persuade his servants to disobey his orders. "How!" said they, "would you be the fools not to profit by the favourable opportunity you have of enjoying yourselves? Come with us, we have a friendly meeting to-day where you shall have all sorts of pleasure." The younger of the two stewards, with the thoughtlessness of his age, suffered himself to be persuaded. He went off, carrying with him the treasure that had been given him in charge, hoping to discharge his duty by taking care of it, whilst enjoying the promised pleasures. As for the elder, he strenuously opposed his going; but all his persuasions and remonstrances were vain, so the other would. The elder remained in the house, continuing to watch faithfully over his deposit, whilst the younger drank and caroused with his gay companions, and appeared at the height of happiness. This state of things lasted some time; but it so happened that the lord returned home unexpectedly in the very middle of the night. Having found the elder of his two stewards engaged in watching over his treasure, he rewarded him as he deserved; then he sent a messenger in search of the other, who was much surprised on hearing of the sudden arrival of his lord. His first thought was to take the treasure he had brought with him and set out at once. Alas! the money had disappeared, and was nowhere to be found. His three seducers had secretly possessed themselves of it, whilst he was only thinking of enjoying himself. You may easily judge, my dear children, how he was received and treated by his master. This parable shows the position of each of us with regard to the commandments of God: if we have been faithful to them when He comes, He will reward us with eternal happiness; in the other case, the fate of the unfaithful servant is reserved for us. - SCHMID et BELET, Catechisme Historique, II., 11
