

"The goods of creation are destined for the whole human race"

Pope Francis spoke about the teaching in the Catechism of the Catholic Church regarding the "universal destination of goods" in his Wednesday November 7 general audience.

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Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Continuing the explanation of the Decalogue, today we arrive at the Seventh Word: “*Do not steal.*”

When we listen to this commandment, we think of the theme of theft and respect for the property of others. There exists no culture in which theft and prevarication of goods are legal; indeed, human sensibility is very susceptible to the defence of possession.

But it is worth opening up to a broader reading of this Word, focusing on the theme of the ownership of goods in the light of Christian wisdom.

The social doctrine of the Church refers to the *universal destination of goods*. What does this mean? Let us listen to what the Catechism tells us.

“In the beginning God entrusted the earth and its resources to the

common stewardship of mankind to take care of them, master them by labour, and enjoy their fruits. The goods of creation are destined for the whole human race” (2402). And again: “The universal destination of goods remains primordial, even if the promotion of the common good requires respect for the right to private property and its exercise” (2403) [i].

However, Providence has not provided for a world in “series”; there are differences, different conditions, different cultures, so that we can live by providing for each other. The world is rich in resources to ensure all primary goods. And yet many live in scandalous poverty, and resources, used without criterion, are deteriorating. But there is just one world! There is just one humanity! [ii] The wealth of the world, today, is in the hands of the minority, of the few, and poverty, or rather misery

and suffering, is of many, of the majority.

If there is hunger on earth, it is not because there is a lack of food!

Rather, for the needs of the market at times we even destroy it and throw it away. What is lacking is free and far-sighted enterprise, that ensures adequate production, with a fraternal approach, ensuring equitable distribution. Again, the Catechism tells us: “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” (2404). Every wealth, to be good, must have a social dimension.

From this perspective, there appears the positive and broader meaning of the commandment “Do not steal.” “The ownership of any property

makes its holder a steward of Providence" (*ibid*). No-one is the absolute master of goods: he is an administrator of goods. Possession is a *responsibility*: "But I am rich in everything..." This is a responsibility that you have. And every property removed from the logic of God's Providence is betrayed: it is betrayed in the deepest sense. That which I truly possess is what I know how to give. This is the measure for valuing whether I succeed in managing wealth, if I do it well or badly; this word is important: that which I truly possess is what I know how to give. If I know how to give, I am open, then I am rich not only in what I possess, but also in generosity, generosity also as a duty to give wealth, so that all can participate in it. Indeed, if I do not succeed in giving something it is because that thing owns me, it has power over me and I am a slave to it. The possession of goods is an opportunity to multiply them with

creativity and to use them with generosity, and in this way grow in charity and in freedom.

Christ Himself, while “being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to His own advantage” (*Phil 2: 6-7*), and He enriched us with His poverty (cf. *2 Cor 8, 9*).

Although humanity strives to have more, God redeems it by making Himself poor: that Crucified Man paid an inestimable ransom on behalf of God the Father, “rich in mercy” (*Eph 2: 4*; cf. *James 5: 11*). It is not property that makes us rich, but love. Very often we hear that the people of God say, “The devil enters through the pockets.” We start with love for money, the hunger to possess; then vanity comes: “Ah, I am rich and I am proud of it”; and in the end, pride and arrogance. This is the

way the devil acts in us. But the gate of entry is always the pockets.

Dear brothers and sisters, once again Jesus Christ reveals to us the full meaning of the Scriptures. “*Do not steal*” means: love with your property, make the most of your means to love as you can. In this way your life becomes good and possession truly becomes a gift. Because life is not the time for possessing, but for loving. Thank you.

[i] Cf. Encyclical *Laudato si'*, 67: Each community can take from the bounty of the earth whatever it needs for subsistence, but it also has the duty to protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations. “The earth is the Lord’s” (Ps 24:1); to him belongs “the earth with all that is within it” (Dt 10:14). Thus God rejects every claim to absolute

ownership: “The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with me” (Lev 25:23).

[ii] Cf. Saint Paul VI, Encyclical *Populorum progressio*, 17: “Each man is also a member of society; hence he belongs to the community of man. It is not just certain individuals but all men who are called to further the development of human society as a whole. ... We are the heirs of earlier generations, and we reap benefits from the efforts of our contemporaries; we are under obligation to all men. Therefore we cannot disregard the welfare of those who will come after us to increase the human family. The reality of human solidarity brings us not only benefits but also obligations.”

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