

Doctrinal Session

APPRENTICES IN FAITH: A Resource for the OCIA Seventh Commandment: You Shall Not Steal

*You shall not have in your bag two kinds of weights, large and small. . . .
[Y]ou shall have only a full and honest measure . . .* (Deuteronomy 25:13, 15a)

Insight

Have you ever had something stolen from you? How did it make you feel?

Ron was overworked and underpaid. Overseeing seven gas stations was no piece of cake. He was up early and in bed late.

That is why Ron overlooked the small stuff, such as employees who routinely did not barcode all of the oil cans or candy bars and pocketed the difference. There were many little ways they were manipulating the system to make a few extra bucks.

The problem, as Ron saw it, was that the employees did not make much money. They earned just above minimum wage. And their little stealing was nothing compared to the actions of some of the area supervisors. Ron knew some supervisors were falsifying the gas level readings they took each month, which allowed them to pocket some extra money.

Everybody was on the take as far as Ron was concerned. He was sick of it but needed to make this job work. He decided to continue to look the other way.

For Reflection . . .

Respect for human dignity demands that in economic matters we do not unjustly take what is another person's property or goods. We are to behave temperately, justly, and in accord with the social doctrine of the Church.

God gives the goods of this world to the entire human race—so why is it necessary to have private property?

Can there be such a thing as having or owning too much? Why or why not?

Additional Background

Catechism of the Catholic Church: 2401–2463

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults: pages 419–428

Compendium—Catechism of the Catholic Church: 503–520

Church Teaching

Goods and Ownership

God gives the fruits of this world, the goods of creation, to the whole human race. But these earthly things are divided up among people to provide security in the face of poverty and violence. In other words, owning things and holding property stems from their legitimate use in meeting the basic human needs of individuals and families.

The Seventh Commandment, as given in the Old Testament and reiterated by Jesus, forbids stealing, which is the unjust taking or keeping of a neighbor's goods (see Exodus 20:15; Deuteronomy 5:19; Matthew 19:18).

Care for Others

Even though this Commandment upholds the right to private property and individual ownership of goods, a person should never forsake the common good, refuse to be generous, or turn away from the needs of the poor.

Good things are meant to be shared. We are obliged to use the goods of production, material or immaterial, as well as practical or artistic skills, so that they benefit the greatest number of people.

Sins Against This Commandment

The Seventh Commandment forbids the deliberate retention of goods lent or objects lost; business fraud; paying unjust wages; forcing up prices by capitalizing on another's ignorance or hardship; manipulating the price of goods artificially; attempting to corruptly influence lawmakers; work poorly done; tax evasion; forgery of checks and invoices; excessive expenses or waste; intentional damage to private or public property; and any practice that leads to humans being bought, sold, or traded like merchandise.