


UNIT THREE: HOW WE LIVE

LESSON 4: THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT: You Shall Not Kill

CONTENTS OF LESSON:

1. Human life is 'sacred' because we are made in God's image. We may not destroy human life deliberately because that right belongs to God alone. In destroying someone's life we are interfering with God's plan for that person. [CCC2207]
2. The Fifth Commandment tells us that:
 - i. MURDER, ABORTION, INFANTICIDE, SUICIDE and EUTHANASIA are serious sins. INDIRECT KILLING is also wrong, as when we refuse to help someone in danger. [CCC2268-2283]
 - ii. When we cause another to sin we are harming their spiritual life. This is known as SCANDAL and Jesus spoke up strongly against it. He also asked us to have peace in our hearts and to give up ANGER, HATRED and REVENGE. [CCC2284, 2302-2203]
 - iii. Self-destructive habits like abuse of DRUGS, ALCOHOL and TOBACCO, OVER-EATING and SPEEDING are also wrong. We are expected to care for our own life. [CCC2290-91]
 - iv. We must respect the body of a person. This means that KIDNAPPING, TERRORISM and TORTURE are wrong. Other than for the health of the person, AMPUTATIONS, MUTILATIONS and STERILIZATIONS are wrong. [CCC2297]
 - v. We must be peace-makers and work and pray for peace. However we may have to stop someone who is attacking others. Self-defense is also right as its intention is to save life. [CCC2263-67; 2307-2208]
3.  I must respect all human life, including my own. I must guard my heart against anger so that it doesn't lead me to sin.

REFERENCES: Genesis 4:2-10; Jeremiah 1:5; Matt 5:9, 21-22, 44, 18:6, 1Cor 6:19.

MATERIALS NEEDED: Handouts; blackboard; Role-play slips for each group.

I. STARTER:

[Write YOU SHALL NOT KILL on the blackboard in large letters.]

- Which commandment is this? [The Fifth.]
- What do you think this commandment is talking about? Killing plants, insects, animals, birds, humans... Or all five? [This commandment refers to killing human-beings.]
- What is so special about human-beings? Why does God command us not kill them? [Human life is considered 'sacred' that is, belonging to God. We are made in God's image. Therefore only God has the right to decide when a person's life on earth should end.]

II. DEVELOPMENT:

- Let's look at some real-life situations which may happen to you now or later in life. Read the outline and discuss: What is wrong with this action? Is there a name for this kind of sin? After talking about it, prepare to enact the situation. The act should not take more than 1 minute, so don't add any extras. You have only 7 minutes to prepare.

[Divide the class into 5 groups. Each group is given one situation to work on. They discuss the situation and then prepare to enact it. After 7-8 minutes give out handouts and invite each group to enact their role-play and share their answers at the appropriate time. The teacher adds the following points:]

- We will look first at the words in the letter K in the handout. All these are examples of killing. [Students write 'KILLING' beneath the 'K']

[First role-play is enacted.]

- ABORTION is MURDER. Do you feel it is worse to kill a grown person or an unborn child? [*Accept students' opinions*]
- From the very moment that the egg is fertilized, a new person exists. [*Refer to Jeremiah 1:5 in the handout*] This person has a right to live like anyone else. When we kill an unborn baby, we are killing a human being who cannot defend himself. He cannot even make a noise or scream.
- Killing a new-born baby (INFANTICIDE) is also a terrible sin. In India this is very wide-spread. Such sins bring down shame and spiritual darkness on the whole of society. The blood of these innocent children cries out to God. [*Refer to Genesis 4:10 in the handout*] We need to fight such crimes and defend the helpless whenever we can.
- SUICIDE is also a serious sin. Why is it wrong? [*Because my life is not my own. It belongs to God.*] [*Refer to 1 Cor 6:19 in the handout.*] St. Paul says that we are temples of the Holy Spirit. However if someone we love has committed suicide, we should not give up hope, but pray for him/her. We know that God is merciful and he knows whether or not the person was in a balanced state of mind when he took his life.

[Role-play 2 is enacted.]

- EUTHANASIA is killing the handicapped, sick or the old because we think their life is not worth living or they are useless to society. Again, it is not for us to decide whether a person is useless or useful. God has a plan for each one, and he knows what we need. Through suffering he can prepare the person and draw him closer to himself. He can make the family members more holy as they learn to love and care for others. Jesus has made suffering meaningful. (However, if a person is actually dying, it is not necessary to somehow keep them alive using extraordinary means, like a ventilator. We can allow them to die in peace, knowing they are going to God.)

[Role-play 3 is enacted.]

- This is an example of INDIRECT KILLING. If we indirectly cause the death of someone by putting them in danger, or refuse to do what we can to prevent a death, we will have to answer for it to God. We should do what we can to help in times of natural calamities like floods or famine, and reach out to victims of accidents.

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- We'll look now at the acts under the letter 'I'.

[Role-play 4 is enacted.]

- What was wrong here? What has it got to do with killing? [*In the act the elder brother was causing spiritual harm to his brother. He was teaching him to sin.*]

This is known as SCANDAL. By our example, we may cause the spiritual death of a person. Jesus spoke very strongly about such a sin. [*Read Mt 18:6 from the handout.*]

- [*Read Mt 5:21-22 from the handout.*] Jesus commented on the Fifth Commandment and said ANGER is sinful. He was not talking about feeling angry (feelings are not sinful in themselves) but feeding your anger till it makes you do something wrong. This is what happened to Cain. When anger becomes HATRED or a desire to have REVENGE and to harm the person, it is sinful. Jesus asked us to love our enemies and do good to those who harm us. He did this himself and we can do it with his help. We'll write SPIRITUAL KILLING under this list.

[Students write SPIRITUAL KILLING beneath the letter I.]

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- All the words under the next letter (L) are self-destructive habits. [*Students write SELF-DESTRUCTIVE HABITS beneath the letter L.*]

[Role-play 5 is enacted.]

- The young man said, "It's my life!" but that was a false statement. His life was a gift from God, but a gift which had to be taken care of. One day each of us will have to give an account to God for what we did with his gift. This is why abuse of DRUGS, ALCOHOL and TOBACCO as well as OVER-EATING or SPEEDING are going against God's commandment.

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- The last group of sins is about harming the body. [*Students write HARMING THE BODY beneath the last letter.*]
- God expects us to respect other people’s bodies too. Even if we don’t go to the extent of killing, hurting or harming others physically is also sinful. So KIDNAPPING, TERRORISM and TORTURE are serious sins. Unless it is for a person’s health, AMPUTATION, MUTILATION and STERILIZATION are against God’s commandment.

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- What about fighting in the army? Or shooting a terrorist in an encounter? Are these wrong or right? [*Students respond.*] The Church explains that self-defense or attacking someone who is a danger to others is saving life. We are not killing for the sake of killing but to save life. In fact it is the duty of the government to protect its citizens. That is why we have the military and police forces. [*Students fill in the answer in their own words.*]
- [*Read Mt 5:9 from the handout.*] God asks us to be peace-makers. How can we do this? [*We always look for a peaceful way to solve a conflict. We pray for peace, in our own lives as well as in the world.*]

III. INTERIORIZATION/PRAYER:

- Let’s read about the very first murder and see what it has to say to us. [*Read Genesis 4:2-10*]
- What was Cain’s first mistake? [*He allowed anger to enter his heart.*]
- What did God say to warn him? [*“Sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it.”*]
- But Cain didn’t take God’s warning to heart. Instead he allowed anger to grow until it led him to kill his brother. Evil begins in our hearts. Let us ask God to help us to fight negative feelings and to be peace-makers in this world.

[Students spend some time in meditation and silent prayer.]

HOME ASSIGNMENT:
 ⇨ Read the handout. ⇨ Share what you have learnt with your family.