

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,
The second commandment is:

You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

This commandment is about helping us recognize the holiness of God. The people of Israel might have been tempted to make vain oaths using God's name, as if it would back up and verify their claims. It would have been common practice to call the gods as part of their oaths. The Lord God wanted the people of Israel to know that He was not like the other gods; He was not to be taken lightly, for He was not only a God of power, but He was intimately connected to His people. He is not far off, ignoring the little oaths uttered by the people, but close and real.

Today's society overlooks this commandment . . . a lot! Please note that using God's name in vain is not just about using His name in anger. It is using His name in a way that is not directed to Him. One synonym of vain is "unproductive"... so if we use His name in an unproductive way, we are sinning against Him. When we use the Lord's name in a way that does not honor Him, we seriously hurt our relationship with Him. How is that (other than the fact that it is a serious sin)? When we use His name in vain, we are acting in a way that makes it seem as if God is not really a person, that He is not real.

What do I mean by that? Have you ever been tempted to use your mother's name in vain? I can't say that I've ever felt like I would say, "Marie Rose" just to let off steam, nor as a mild cuss, nor to show how surprised I was. Yet, we do this with God's name all the time. It is even in children's shows, as people say, "O my God" repeatedly. What does that do? It makes God seem impersonal or fake. How can we get into relationship with a swear word? We can't!

I remember one time when I was home from college, I went to visit our neighbors. I mentioned the name of Jesus in conversation with their three girls, and the middle one, who was about eight at the time, said to her father, "Dad, Von said a bad word!" Even though she had made her First Communion, somehow she had never known that Jesus was more than a swear to be avoided in her house. Sadly, Jesus was impersonalized.

I believe it is a ploy of the devil to make one of the most common expressions be that of blasphemy. When I was a camper, we had other youth from Quebec, and their French curses were blasphemies against the sacred Tabernacle (where the Eucharistic Lord dwells), or against Mary (and her color – the sacred blue). The devil desires God's glory to be ignored, and wants us to treat God as if He were no more real than ogres, and no more personally interested in our lives than our car stereo.

How do we use God's name? How do we refer to the things of God? If we use "God," "Jesus," or "Lord" in a way that is vain, it hurts our relationship with Him. A rule of thumb is never to use God's name in a way I would not use someone else's – meaning I won't use God's name unless I'm speaking to Him (praying) or about Him. I have told people that if they really *must* use someone's name in vain, they should use mine, "O my Von!" (or "OMV," as needed). It's silly, but I think it gets the point across. Who would do that (except jokingly)? And yet, we do this to God *all the time!*

I realize that for some, you don't even realize you are doing this. For some, it has become so much a part of your vocabulary that you don't recognize the words even when they come out of your mouth. I encourage you to pray to God, asking Him to help you to keep hallowed His name (as we pray in the Our Father). Ask God for the grace to change your habits, so that you may hold His name holy.