February 5, 1956

Dear Fellow Countrymen and Countrywomen.

I greet you with the words: Praised be Jesus In the last two broadcasts I spoke of the meaning of the Seventh Commandment of God, “Thou Shalt not Steal”! I spoke of the many and various sins which are covered by this commandment. Generally, the ordinary variety of transgressions is theft, committed when some takes something from another secretly (robbery) – when someone takes someone else’s property through trickery. Under the term fraud are those acts such not repaying debts or overcharging payments and overcharging at an unfair percentage. As far as the wrong-doers are concerned, those at fault who find lost things but do not try to return them and those who destroy someone else’s property or those who aid and abet others in doing so. It is almost impossible to list all the examples against this commandment. The jealousy and greed of some people are filled with a tendency to reach for what belongs to others. And this occurs among beggars, the very poor, and the very rich! Saint Jerome seemingly knew that characteristic when he said: “Rare is a rich man, who does not damage someone, or has not received anything ill-gotten from his ancestors acquired by them " – In Rome, next to the famous Castel Sant'Angelo, there is a chapel dedicated to the Souls in purgatory. A small museum exists next to the Castle in which are stored articles concerning people, who after death, came back to earth with the will of God and appeared to people. In the museum there are two wide boards with impressions of coins. The history is such: Among the Capucian brothers who went on begging missions there was one who was seventy three years old. He was a pious, devout and gentle man. However, he one dominant fault: he liked to use tobacco! He was an enterprising fellow. The elderly man brought to mind about what would be his problem when he could not go begging any longer It was the money he begged for that paid for the tobacco he used the sniff through his nose. So in addition from money which he got begging, he was able to pay for the tobacco he bought. And so the cents he had, he began to save for the future. Of course, his superior had no idea of his plans. One morning, they found him lifeless. The superior found a cloth bag with the money he was setting aside. After the funeral he wand to his cell, and sat at the table on which lay the cloth bag containing the money. He lifted his head and saw a vision of the brother that had passed away who spoke, “I am in puratory,and I would like my fellow brothers to pray for me. At saying that he pressed his hands upon the money bag and disappeared. The brothers gave the money to the museum that was near the chapel. And so on to our talk entitled

 “Give Back What You Owe”

Scripture has it that “Some give out what they have but do not get richer; others, take; what is not their and are always in need. Among the Polish aphorisms, we have: “Cudza krzywda nie utuczy.” (A foreign offense does not make things better) And “Zle nabyte, nie będzie spożyte.” Something ill-gotten cannot be consumed,) And “Zle nabyte, nie przejdzie na trzecie pokolenie! (Ill-gotten good cannot be transferred to the third generation) In order of man’s labor to be of any worth, satisfaction and peace, Gods blessings on it is necessary. No one can deny that. However is it possible for any man to expect his work to have the blessing of God if he steals something that belongs to others and therefore breaks the seventh commandment of God/l Man has a thousand excuses at hand for perpetrating injustice. This is one of the most general. Some years ago, in 1937, I was interest I was greatly interested in plight of the worker.to the extent that I was chosen to serve as arbitrator of three sock factories in Buffalo. In connection with this job, I was required to attend meetings in Kenosha, Milwaukee, St. Paul and other places. It was necessary for me to stay at various hotels.

When in one of these cities in the mid-west, a man who was sufficiently under the weather joined me. He introduced himself as an official of one of the major cities. He considered himself clever in faking receipt to obtain cash and ordered coal for his own household, and filled his own car with gas and charged car expenses to the company and things like that. When I reminded him that he was stealing, that he was a thief and was responsible to pay back what he actually stole. He had to make restitution. He gave me a crooked look and said angrily, “Reverend Sir! You should know that all of our officials practice that!” He justified his thievery by saying “Everybody does that!” I know that only too well. But such an excuse is not worth a pound of straw! What would you say if they robbed you? Besides, people break other commandments; are they not worth something so are you free of obey those? That kind of thinking is not the domain of the honesso? Are you to praise them for doing that? You’re kiddin’ me! Are you cursing them and wishing them ill fortune and eternal damnation? You are doing the same thing, What a child you are. What you consider vice in the other you call cunning progress and education in yourself. Others explain: If I hadn’t taken it someone else would have. And perhaps he would not become a thief? Or maybe he was not obligated to return it and make restitution for some valid reason. God is not going to judge you on someone else’s thievery. – There are those who justify their wrong doing by saying that they didn’t steal, but that they merely borrowed what they stole because they needed it. These people belong to a group that will not restitute it for eternity. Neither God’s law nor man’s law will go along with that kind of justice. Besides, if a car is so indispensable to me, is it lawful for me just to take someone else’s car? I wear an old worn out hat; am I free to walk into a haberdashery and help myself to a brand new hat? If I were to do that, the judge would convince me quickly that I made a mistake and send me to the jail to recuperate in the jail from my delirium. The seventh commandment is absolute: “Do not steal!” It commands against all theft, yes, all theft. If the Creator said, “Don’t steal a lot!”, but you can steal a little!” Then the world would change into a den of thieves. Because everybody would make the assumption that it was, after all, just a pittance. Another excuse is the claim that the amount taken was inconsequential to the person and is rich and will hardly notice that something was taken. Listen my little thief! The commandment does not say, “’Thou shalt not steal from the poor.” If everybody thought that way, what would happen? Probably you too have more than others, and you would be cheated by others and end up with a poor box and a pauper’s cane. Can’t you see that your reasoning is faulty! In our times, even the common worker becomes a moral theologian and maintains the robbing from a breadwinner is not a sin. The result is that one takes as his own a hammer, ax, and the similar. The Seventh Commandment is clear, and understandable, “Do not steal!” And that means: do not steal anything from no one at any time. There are no exceptions to the rule! May I add here that the worker is due recompense for the work he does but has not the right to steal. The employer has the obligation of giving the worker a faith pay for the work he does., otherwise he steals from the worker and calls vengeance to heaven for the injustice done to him.

Now I come to deal with a very delicate matter. To avoid being one sided, I take recourse to a moralist, who writes strait from the hip: “Children, of whom there is a few, who systematically steal from their parents ordinarily say: “When I take from my parents when they are not aware and say: “what I take is not from anyone else but from my own parents and is mine anyway. But the Lord forbids stealing no matter who it is from. As long as your parents live, what they own is theirs. Holy scripture says c learly through the Apostle of the nations? “You are the future heir to the parental estate, but as long as the parents live, you do not have the right to this property. Besides, since you are taking secretly, You are demonstrating that you are wronging your parents. I’ll add, When you take from your parents, you think and say that what you take is yours, you are treating your parents as if they were dead and look forward to their death; that is why Holy Scripture says of your action: “Who takes what is your father’s or mother ‘s and says that that is no sin, is a companion of patricide.!” Besides, when you get used to taking from your mother or father you are conditioning yourself to rob from others when your parents are dead. The parents are also responsible because if they do not reprimand their children, they could be negligent in upbringing them.

 It is useless for those who buy stolen goods and to give excuses because they themselves have not stolen the goods. The same can be said of people who find lost items. They reason is “finders keepers.” Another excuse for not returning things that they have borrowed is their own poverty. ”I cannot pay my debt because I am poor.” One forgets how grateful they were when borrowing. Remember that while you have the time to repay debts, you should repay them. You can’ t be living in luxury and not pay back debts while you are able to. Elisa the prophet when distributing olive oil told her that she ought to pay back her debts from the moneys received from the sale of the oil that she had freely gotten. A bit yet about youthful vandalism Children who deface desks in schools are hurting others. They break they break the Seventh Commandment.and are committing sin. Parents are responsible because they should teach their children and are obliged to restitute what their children have done or damage incurred. Every theft is by it very nature a sin. For social order tome maintain all are responsible for breaking the seventh commandment. Society was built on the principle of maintaining peace and preventing harm to the social compact. Every society is built on the principle of the common good. Thievery is a sin against the common good of all. The treasure of the unjust is a dry river bed,” dictates Holy Scripture. Everyone is aware that the flooded plain become saturated after a rainstorm but when the storm passes the waters dry up and dryness occurs. It is a picture of a neighbors hurt. Incurred by the Spirits lack. Perhaps you disagree? Listen a while! As a boy, I lived in a small hamlet in Pennsylvania. I worked with my father in a coke factory. The workers received a dollar and twenty five cents for twelve hours of work. Among the workers was a worker who had long fingers and filched others property whenever the occasion arrived when he could do so. From one of the other workers he would rob a hammer, from another, an ax. At other times he would steal a chicken or a duckling. He would add these to his wages earned. On Sundays when the farmers were away at church and away from their property he would rob from their farms. One time he would appropriate potatoes, at another time, a bag full of beets or a bushel of apples. Despite the fact that he never sowed a seed. He fed his family with ill-gotten goods. Sometimes he even sold back to the farmers what he had stolen from them. He prided himself on his ingenuity! He stashed what monies he had earned from his stolen in a hidden place. The famers found out about his hidden stash where he had accumulated about five hundred dollars. In those days it was a significant sum of money. At the same time there was a strike by the workers; Frick and Company brought in a group of strike breakers. This group came upon the stash that the thief had hidden. One Sunday when all were in church the thief discovered that his bag of money was gone, and became a madman screaming, “My bag, my bag is gone…someone stole my bag of money.” It was a catastrophe. The locals thought that he had gone crazy! When he settled down he admitted that he had buried the money in a steel pitcher underneath the house where the strike breakers had discovered it. He had a nervous breakdown and was out of commission for some time. The thief was never caught and the stasher was heartbroken that his stash had been taken. And so, “It does not pay to steal, as the saying goes. The mouse and the rat are eventually in the trap and have to pay for their misdeeds. Some are thieves for a long time and then at last follow the line of just ice. Some end up in prison; others end up in the electric chair. Holy Scripture tells us the way thieves pay for their thievery.. I won’t go through the details but again remind you that it does not pay to steal for what does it profit a man to possess all these material goods and yet, lose his soul say the Scriptures. The thief will say to himself that sooner or later he will give back what he owes; ye t he may not live long enough to do that. Or they justify their thievery by saying they are sorry. At times the thief will say that he will restitute before he dies but that rarely happens. Some think that it is sufficient t o be sorry for their transgressions before they die. The law of just ice demands that perpetrators need to atone for their misdeeds as soon as possible while they are able instead of postpone it. The soul of the person who has been robbed cries out, “Give back what you have taken.” So speaks the law of justice!” Even the pagan is away in Natural law that recompense needs to be given. The natural law speaks even to the pagan: “Give back what you have taken, what is not yours. “ and “What you don’t want others to do to you, do not do to others What you want others to do to you, do to others. There is, in the Old Testament, in Exodus a law that the thief had to give back four or five times the value of what he stole. We read in the book of Exodus “I someone steals and keeps or sells an ox or a sheep od kills it for himself reimburse that person with five oxen or five sheep. St. Paul writes, “Give everything you have borrowed. St. Augustin teaches. “The sin will not be forgiven until the .stolen is returned. The church teaches that priests hands are tied and they are unable to forgive in the Sacrament of Confession if the person has stolen and refuses to make restitution. The conscience every human being who has been maligned, shouts out: constantly, “Give back what is not yours.” Why is it that call so ever present? There are laws of nature known to every man, even in the pagan: ”If you don’t want to be maligned, do not malign others. Even when someone borrows something, we would prefer they returned it as soon as possible. If the person you owe something has died , then to whom do we do the restitution. You can give to the poor or contribute to the red cross or similar institutions in recompense or for a mass to be said for the deceased. So the idea is to give back what you borrow from others. In the book of Tobias we read

“Give back you borrow as soon as possible. Dallying in return what you owe only will make the matter worse. Who doesn’t return what he wants immediately indicates his willingness there is also partial recompense which indicates a willingness to pay back. Sometime one doesn’t know how to recompense. The Seventh Commandment reminds us of our obligation to ourselves and our neighbors. One of the obligations is to protect selves and family. And so you work to keep the family in good stead. It’s not that you don’t need resources for recreation either. But when justice calls, one must think of repaying his debt before using his money for recreational activities. Justice before entertainment. To take care of the needs of a family, there is a need of thrift and smart management. There is the matter of common activity with friends and neighbors. If one is no willing to work, he is not available to eat. There are the obligations to God so salvation could be assured. There are obligations that have to be fulfilled to our God. If God does not build the house, we work fruitlessly who build it. “Neither does the one who plants is anything special, neither the one who waters, but only the One who multiplies the produce – God!” We have the obligation of prayer: “Ask and you shall receive” There is the obligation of love and thankfulness as well! And so I end my lessons regarding the Seventh Commandment. Let us promote justice, giving to each as is the obligation. Then we will serve God in name, in health and in good fortune!

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