



Illustrations created with Grok (AI) and reviewed by our team

God Gives the Ten Commandments

Exodus 19:1–20:21 · Bud · Ages 9–12

In the third month after leaving Egypt, the people of Israel reached Mount Sinai in the desert and camped there. Moses went up the mountain, and God gave him a message for the people. God reminded them that he had rescued them from Egypt and brought them to himself, as an eagle carries its young. If they kept his covenant, they would be his own treasured people, a holy nation. The people agreed with one voice.

God told Moses to get the people ready. They washed their clothes, and for three days they prepared their hearts. A boundary was set around the mountain, because God's holiness is not something to treat lightly.

On the third morning thick cloud, thunder and lightning came down on Sinai, and a trumpet blast grew louder and louder. Smoke rose from the mountain like a furnace, and the ground shook. Then God spoke the Ten Commandments.

Notice how they begin. Before giving a single rule, God says who he is: the Lord who brought them out of slavery. The commandments are not the price of God's love. They are the way of life for people God has already set free.

Catholics count the commandments the way St. Augustine did. The first three are about God: worship only the true God, honor his holy name, and keep the Lord's Day holy. The last seven are about our neighbor: honor your father and mother; do not kill; do not commit adultery, which means be faithful in marriage; do not steal; do not lie about others; do not desire another person's spouse; and do not desire what belongs to others.

The people were overwhelmed and asked Moses to listen to God for them and tell them what he said. Moses told them not to be afraid. God was testing them so that they would respect him and not sin.

The Church teaches that the commandments are written on every human heart and help us see clearly what love asks (CCC 2070, 2072). Jesus did not throw them away. He showed what they mean in full: love God and love your neighbor.

Church teaching note

Church teaching: the commandments take their full meaning within the covenant (CCC 2061–2062); the first three concern love of God, the other seven love of neighbor (CCC 2067); Catholic numbering follows St. Augustine (CCC 2066); they express the natural law (CCC 2070).

Talk about it

1. Why do you think God reminded the people that he had freed them before giving any rules?
2. How does the Catholic Church group the commandments, and why does that make sense?
3. Which commandment is hardest for people your age? Why?
4. How did Jesus sum up all the commandments?

Key verse: Ex 20:2. Look it up in your Bible.