



# Transformations

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**A**re you an iconoclast? An iconoclast is an image **breaker**. Throughout history, Catholics have been image **makers**. We use signs and symbols to help us deepen our faith. Not everyone agrees with us, however.

## What is the second commandment?

Over the centuries there has been much debate over the use of religious signs and symbols, especially religious images. The lack of agreement is due to a difference in interpretation of the Ten Commandments. God didn't number them when He wrote them on Moses' stone tablets, so we've been left to figure out the specifics for ourselves. Exodus 20:3-6 and Dn 5:6-10 both state the following:

- ◆ You shall have no other gods before me.  
You shall not make yourself a carved image...you shall not bow down and worship them

Catholics and Jews consider this one commandment which describes methods of worship. Protestants interpret these statements as two separate commandments:

- ◆ You shall have no other gods before me
- ◆ You shall not make for yourself a carved image...you shall not bow down and worship them

## What's the difference?

The Catholic Church teaches that this commandment forbids worshiping an image as God, but it does not forbid all use of images. If you keep reading the book of Exodus, you'll see that God instructed Moses to make the Ark of the Covenant to hold the tablets. He instructed it be decorated with – you guessed it – images. When serpents invaded the camp of the wandering Israelites, what did Moses do? He made a bronze

serpent on a cross. When the Israelites looked upon this image, they were cured of the lethal effects of the venom from the serpent bites.

These passages suggest, and our Church Fathers agreed, that images were fine for deepening faith, as long as these same images were not recognized as, and worshiped as, a god.

## A world of distractions

The concern is that images will distract us from God. But everything in our lives can do that: homework, friends, a busy schedule, you name it. Anything can distract us from prayerful contemplation of the true God. If a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the garden, a crucifix hanging on the wall, or another sacred image allows us to refocus our lives on God, that's all the better.

## Balancing the equation

You may be wondering why we all still have 10 commandments when there is a difference in the numbering at the beginning. Compare the last statements:

- ◆ You shall not covet you neighbor's house.  
You shall not covet your neighbor's wife..."

Whereas Protestants consider this the 10<sup>th</sup> commandment, Catholics separate these statements. St. Augustine argued that interfering in your neighbor's marriage (Catholic commandment #9) is far different from desiring your neighbor's house and goods (commandment #10). This division, Augustine said, is consistent with the emphasis that Jesus put on the sanctity of marriage. Our Church agreed.