

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The Seventh Commandment is “Do not Steal”. We think of theft as breaking into someone’s house, robbing a bank, shoplifting or taking something that doesn’t belong to us. All these actions are forms of stealing, but it is more complicated than that.

The Catholic Church teaches that the right of ownership is based in a common sharing of the world’s resources. When God created Adam, he made him steward of all creation for the common good of all. From this we are granted the right to private property, but we also derive from this created order the responsibility to be stewards of our property in a way that is fair and beneficial to all.

Therefore, for the common good we are expected to practice temperance and a simple life. We are not to be overly attached to material goods and riches. In other words, greed is a form of stealing. We should live simply so that others may simply live.

This brings into question a whole range of economic practices. Paying unfairly low wages is stealing. Not doing an honest day’s work is stealing. Fraud, cheating on taxes or expense claims, charging too much interest, depriving workers of benefits, cutting crooked deals, breaking contracts, not paying bills, accumulating unfair levels of debt, exploiting workers, exploiting gamblers and extorting money through blackmail and undue pressure--all of these are forms of stealing.

Taking advantage of the poor, taking or giving bribes, insider trading, crooked insurance and stockbroker deals, big business pressuring government or international traders for undue advantage--all these are forms of stealing.

Taking money from some and giving it to others without them earning it is a form of governmental stealing. Unfair and enforced taxation is a form of stealing. Refusing to give alms to the poor is stealing. Not tithing is to steal from Christ’s Church. Expecting to get money or goods without working when one is able to work is also a form of stealing.

The list could go on and on. The basic principle is that we are given this world’s wealth not to please ourselves, but to serve God and serve others. We are given the call and the power to work to earn wealth in order to serve God and serve others.

Therefore, whenever we seek to accumulate wealth at the unfair expense of others, we are thieves because the wealth is given to us to serve them, not to enslave them.

Your Pastor,  
Fr. Longenecker