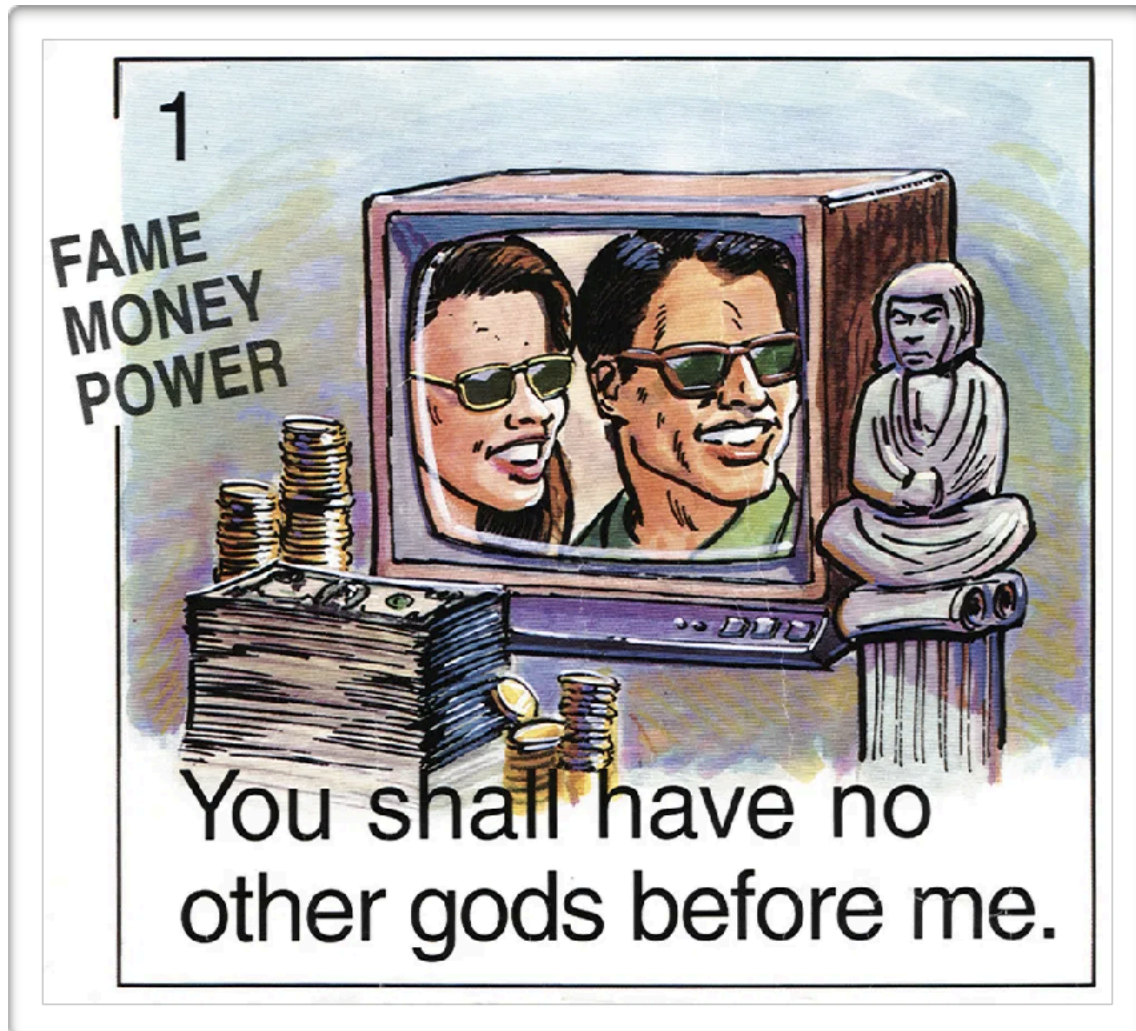


FALSE GODS



Many Catholics, both cradle and converts, have at least once if not more times, engaged in worshipping other false gods (idolatry).

Who and what are these other gods? They are not just money and power, fame and glory. There are Catholics who have gone into occult and new age practices without knowing what they are getting into, until it's too late. Sooner or later they experienced spiritual attacks, emotional and mental disturbances, unhappiness, family break ups and divisions, incessant quarrels, etc. And wonder why? Answer is, God was placed in a dingy corner of their lives, their homes, their hearts.

Many have not heard the word, 'syncretism' or are oblivious to occult and new age practices. These practices appear harmless at first and seemed to give a false sense of harmony, good luck and aesthetic balance, such as fengshui, reiki, yoga, crystal ball, 'religious' gurus of other faith, and mediums who promise fame and fortune.

*Who do I worship?
What am I chasing
after?*



This is a false and myopic view – that when all is rosy and there is no suffering, means that they are on the “right path” of life. They go to church once a week, say some prayers and have holy statues on the altar and somewhere around the home, they have crystal balls, amethyst, other ‘good luck’ charms and stones, ceramic cat-hand-waving, which they believe bring good health and wealth. Have we taken the 1st Commandment so glibly and lightly? *“I am the Lord, your God, you shall have NO other gods but me.”* Other gods can be anything - possessions, desires, goals or even people that we treat as more important than the true God.

God began the 10 Commandments this way: *“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me”* (Exodus 20:3). Jesus set the example of putting God first. Even after fasting for 40 days, He responded to Satan’s temptation by saying, *“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God”* (Matthew 4:4; quoted from Deuteronomy 8:3). Living by every word of God involves a commitment to always listen to what God teaches us in the Bible and not to lean on our own understanding (Proverbs 3:5-6).



The First Commandment reminds us of God’s greatness and how we should respond

The First Commandment is a reminder to focus on the awesome power and majesty of our Creator God. Not on the power of occult, new age and fengshui. God’s power was on display when He thundered these commandments from Mount Sinai. But some prefer to turn to instant results through other ‘powers’ and sooner or later got entangled with the other ‘evil spirits’. Some of the disguises of these evil spirits have soft undertones, that promises false consolations, power over helpless situation, power over those who have hurt them, power in getting what they want, mostly material goods, physical cure and false peace. God’s lasting peace comes even in the midst of pain and suffering. Our Blessed Mother of Sorrows is not spared from suffering and pain, yet she clung on to GOD only. What the other gods promise is fake peace without suffering and pain. This is a false teaching with empty promises and will lead one astray in a matter of time. And Jesus put things in perspective for His disciples: *“And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell”* (Matthew 10:28).

The right type of fear of God is not terror or torment, but reverence and deep respect that recognises God’s Almighty Power and puts God first



We humans tend to fear other people we can see and forget the Almighty God we can’t see.



But Christ followed this up with a discussion of our awesome God's purpose and love for us. The God who notices every sparrow that falls and who knows the number of hairs on our head tells His faithful followers, *"Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows"* (Matthew 10:31).

First Commandment violations by not putting God first

There are many pitfalls and temptations that can lead us to disobey the First Commandment. This commandment is not just about pagan gods and false religions. Anything that we put as higher priority than the true God causes us to sin. Pride, that common human failing, breaks this command by putting self above God. As James wrote: "But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.' Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up" (James 4:6-10). We need to seek God's help to see things from God's perspective - to get outside our own selfish worldview.

*Syncretism is an insult
to Jesus*



Horrors of Syncretism

In the biblical sense, syncretism has to do with seeking to worship the one true God while also dragging elements of false religions into the mix. It is the vain attempt to worship God but also worship other gods. It is an attempt to mix true and false religious beliefs and practices.

It cannot work, it does not work, and it only brings about the greatest of evils and retribution. The Bible is full of both warnings against, and examples of, religious syncretism. No one reading all these accounts can ever come away with the idea that God simply winks at syncretism. He judges it utterly harshly – and rightly so.

The Israelites never thought of renouncing God when they persuaded Aaron to make the golden calf. Quite right. And believers are doing it all the time. They may go to church and say all the right things and appear to be doing all the right things, but they still have a heap of idols in their lives. They see no problem with what we read in Kings: “While these people were worshiping the Lord, they were serving their idols” (2 Kings 17:41).



That is why God is ever seeking to break the lousy idols in our life. He loves us too much to allow us to cling to our lifeless and deadly idols. And for God to be true to Himself, He must oppose and detest all idolatry. Otherwise He would not really be God.

How many Christians are back to their pre-conversion state, just as full of idols, false gods and so on? Be it the worship of power, or immoral entertainment, or trivial pursuits of addictions, or sex, or untamed ambitions, or excessive attachment to social media, and so on. Simply buying all the values and beliefs of the world is a massive form of idolatry. And most of all dabbling in the occult and new age practices instead of relying on God even in the most challenging and difficult times. This calls for trust and patience. We live in an ‘instant gratification’ society where every form of pain must be eradicated by hook or by crook, by mediums and witch doctors. For our warning and our learning, we all would do well to pause where we are at right now, and engage in a careful spiritual check-up. We all need to do some spring cleaning here, and weed out any idols that might be found. If we don’t, God certainly will soon enough deal with them.

The Fear of the LORD...

... is the beginning of knowledge. Proverbs 1:7
 ... finds the knowledge of God. Proverbs 2:5
 ... is to hate evil. Proverbs 8:13
 ... is the beginning of wisdom. Proverbs 9:10
 ... prolongs days. Proverbs 10:27
 ... is strong confidence. Proverbs 14:26
 ... is a fountain of life. Proverbs 14:27
 ... is the instruction of wisdom. Proverbs 15:33
 ... departs from evil. Proverbs 16:6
 ... leads to life. Proverbs 19:23
 ... is riches and honor and life. Proverbs 22:4

Respect and awe of God’s power is not a bad thing. Moses told the people the result that our loving Creator wanted. And Moses said to the people, “Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin” (Exodus 20:20). Wise King Solomon explained, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Proverbs 1:7). **So what are our idols today?** There may be few or many and we all need to take careful stock of our lives. An idol is anything which displaces God in our heart. It may be something which ‘seem’ quite harmless in itself, yet if it absorbs us, if it be given the first place in our affections and thoughts, it becomes an ‘idol’. It may be our business, our hobbies, our attachment

to social media, obsession with a loved one, or even our ministry. Anyone or anything which comes into competition with the Lord’s ruling and guiding us in a practical way, is an ‘idol’.

Israel of old thought they could worship the Lord and also worship their idols. They paid a heavy price for such foolishness. Forty years in the wilderness. **Can we expect to be let off any lighter for doing exactly the same thing?**