

By  
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## Theft of a Painting

George Romney (1734-1802) was a magnificent artist and the most fashionable painter of his time. He once painted a portrait of Lord Nelson as a boy that hung in an English castle for many years. One night a thief cut the painting from its heavy gold frame, grieving the people of the castle who owned it.

Some years ago a workman who was digging in the castle basement found a secret passage, where he discovered a skeleton clutching a dirty piece of canvas. The workman opened the canvas and seeing it was covered with dirt and mold, decided to get rid of it. He stopped at a pub on his way home. He showed the canvas to the bartender and asked him how much he'd give him for it. They agreed on a bottle of whiskey.

It was later discovered that this was the very painting that had been stolen from the castle years before. An expert cleaned and restored the painting to its original condition. The painting was sold at auction soon thereafter for \$200,000.

The workman didn't know the value of the picture. You have a most precious picture of God in your soul, if you're in a state of grace. There's nothing in the world that could be considered a greater evil than to lose that picture of God, because it means giving up God's friendship. The loss of God's friendship means losing God Himself, happiness, and heaven. Satan and his minions will tempt you to sell them this picture of God. They'll offer you a minuscule price—a small pleasure, an act of self-will, a justification that makes chronic sin okay in your mind. But don't be as foolish as the workman was! Don't sell your soul for a trifling pittance by committing mortal sin, which is the greatest evil in the world!

People talk about me behind my back all the time. They say I'm a fanatic, because I tell any Catholic who will listen that *nothing* is more important than God and staying in His friendship—a state of grace. They say there are other things in life besides God and the Church. They claim that saying the things I say makes you mentally unbalanced. But St. Paul had something to say about that: "Claiming to be wise, they became fools..." (Romans 1:22).

Hey, I'm not saying God is the only thing in life, just that He's the only thing that matters. During most of my Catholic life I've been an architectural wood carver and furniture maker who specialized in 18<sup>th</sup> century furniture reproductions. I studied the artistry of greats such as Hepplewhite and Chippendale, as well as carvers, both modern and ancient. I lived and breathed my art, but God and my relationship to Him has always taken first place. All I'm saying is, that's the way it should be for all of us.

When we take the attitude that it's fanatical to believe nothing is more important than God and our relationship to him, we automatically imply that we place other gods before Him; that we violate the first commandment. So that attitude is a very dangerous proposition to maintain.

Think for a moment about the things in your life and decide for yourself if you're placing a lot of little gods before God. Have you ever skipped Mass to watch a big game on television, take a little trip, or do something outdoors because it's such a pretty day? If you have, God is less than first in your life, which means those things have become your god.

I used to love to fish as often as I could; for years I fished at least one day each week year round. When I was young, I loved to go hunting. Both of those things usually require getting started before sunup. Maybe you like those things too, or perhaps something else that requires you to get up early to get started. If so, do you take time to first say your morning prayers? Do you get up and get ready for work without saying your prayers? If you answered yes to that question, you may consider yourself a member of the biggest club in the world. I call it the *Idolater's Club*. It's not a very prestigious club. It's full of everything from reprobates to heathens to perverts. When you think about it, the *Idolater's Club* is probably not a membership you want to brag about.

Why not resign from the *Idolater's Club* today? Resignation is easy. All it takes is a good confession. There are five elements necessary to make a good confession. One of those elements is to have your mind made up not to sin again. That's why you promise God in your act of contrition that you'll sin no more, and avoid all the near occasions of sin. That doesn't mean that you won't sin again. After all, the effects of original sin are alive and well in everyone's soul. Still, you have to make up your mind to break with all sin. Then you can become a member in good standing of the *Firm Purpose of Amendment Club*.

Your *Firm Purpose of Amendment Club* membership entitles you to a bevy of benefits. In fact, the club membership benefits are infinite, like the Founder of the club—God. Among some of the many benefits you receive, you get to receive the graces that help you choose good and avoid evil, thus staying in a state of grace. If you're a dedicated and faithful member of the *Firm Purpose of Amendment Club* you get an automatic membership application to the *Eternal Bliss Club*. Perhaps the most impressive benefit of club membership is that you begin building a level of self-respect you never before experienced because you begin to realize how special you are among God's creatures. You'll begin to realize not only that you're the highest form of natural creation and that you're created in His image and likeness, but *why* you're the highest form of natural creation and that you're created in His image and likeness.

I was talking to a friend just yesterday who came to a realization about this. We all know that we're created in God's image and likeness, but apparently many Catholics don't understand what that means. Being created in His image and likeness doesn't have anything to do with how we look—arms, legs, a head. God is pure spirit, so He has no body with arms, legs, a head. He's a perfect Being who is pure spirit with intellect and free will. That's how He made us to be like Him. He designed nature so we can help Him in the creation of a human, but we only help in the creation of a body. He creates the God-like part of us, giving us a soul with intellect and free will. That's what makes us the highest of all natural creatures—makes us like Him. And that soul He gives you is unique and immortal. Dogs don't have an immortal soul. Cats don't have an immortal soul. Rabbits don't have one. Neither do monkeys nor mice nor any other creature. That's how special you are, but sin abuses that specialness and uniqueness. It's time for confession.