

By  
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## Reputation

As I write these words there is something going on in the political arena that provides an excellent teaching moment for Catholics about the eighth commandment. I'm talking about the confirmation hearings for Judge Brett Kavanaugh's proposed appointment to the United States Supreme Court. Now, by necessity I'll have to write about politics, which I am loathe to do, but that's the only way to fully understand the gravity of the blatant mortal sin being committed against the eighth commandment.

Kavanaugh's hearings were going as planned, and it appeared the senate judiciary committee was about to send his confirmation to the full floor of the senate for a vote. Then, out of the clear blue, Senator Diane Feinstein made an eleventh hour sexual assault accusation against Judge Kavanaugh. If the accusation turns out to be true, then exposing such a thing about a man who would sit as a justice on the Supreme Court would be a good thing. After all, the Supreme Court vacancy needs to be filled by someone of a good moral character. So the lesson to be learned here has nothing to do with the accusation itself, but rather *how* the accusation is being made.

The eighth commandment says, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." Are the politicians and pundits bearing false witness against Judge Kavanaugh? Well, yes they are. These allegations may turn out to be true, but Democrats and the mainstream media are blatantly offending Almighty God for political gain by the way the accusations are being carried out.

The Church teaches that every man, woman and child has a right to his or her good name and reputation, and that it is a mortal sin—a sin worthy of eternity in hell—to unjustly impugn someone's good name and reputation. And that is exactly what is being done now.

Judeo-Christian morality has always held what the framers of our constitution enshrined in that remarkable document; that a man is innocent until proven guilty. An accusation alone does not make a man guilty, and no one has the right to make an assertion of guilt until a court of law makes a finding of guilt. After all, I could be accused of being the real murderer of Martin Luther King in 1968. Never mind I was only just entering puberty then. If we apply what is being done to Judge Kavanaugh, I'd not only be a murderer but a racist as well... all because someone made an accusation. Does that seem absurd and like I'm comparing apples to oranges? If you think so, your thinking would be wrong. Guilt by accusation alone would unjustly send me to prison and ruin my good name and reputation.

Virtually every Democratic senator and left-wing pundit has declared Judge Kavanaugh guilty as charged, but there hasn't been any testimony heard, no evidence presented, and no trial has taken or will take place. Regardless of how this turns out, Judge Kavanaugh's good name and repu-

tation will be forever tarnished, his wife and daughters are forever humiliated, and extremists threaten the lives of the judge and his family because of unjust accusations. It shouldn't surprise us that the left has trashed Judge Kavanaugh and offended God so blatantly for political gain. These are the very same people who promote abortion on demand, contraception, homosexuality and the entire LGBT agenda—all of which gravely offend God. But expecting this sort of behavior from these people doesn't mean it's right or should be accepted. Furthermore, for any Catholic to play along with these accusations absent of an official finding of guilt by a court of law, that Catholic is equally guilty of mortal sin against the eighth commandment!

Of the Ten Commandments, the first three deal with man's relationship to God, and the last seven deal with man's relationship to both God and man. But the eighth commandment is the only one that allows for civil penalties for its violation. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says, "Every offense committed against justice and truth entails the *duty of reparation*, even if its author has been forgiven. When it is impossible publicly to make reparation for a wrong, it must be made secretly. If someone who has suffered harm cannot be directly compensated, he must be given moral satisfaction in the name of charity. This duty of reparation also concerns offenses against another's reputation. This reparation, *moral and sometimes material* (emphasis added), must be evaluated in terms of the extent of the damage inflicted. It obliges in conscience." (CCC 2487) In other words, a law suit is justified in the case of ruined reputation. That's why we have slander and libel laws.

We have become a very litigious society. A woman suing a fast food restaurant chain a few years back because she was burned with hot coffee she spilled on herself proves that (and she actually won!), so litigation should not always be the preferred means of handling problems. But when it comes to one's good name and reputation, litigation is often advisable. The idea behind it isn't to make money from the offender, but rather for a court to officially declare that the plaintiff's reputation has been unjustly harmed and must be repaired by judicial ruling. So right now, regardless of how this turns out, Judge Kavanaugh has the right to sue every senator and pundit who had impugned his name and reputation with these unfounded revelations.

As you can see, violating the eighth commandment is exceedingly serious. Yet it is perhaps the most ignored commandment among Catholics. I suspect this merely on the basis of things I hear in conversations. And this commandment entails so much more than reputation. It covers lying (there's no such thing as a "white lie"), false witnessing, rash judging, rash suspicions, flattery, tale bearing, detraction, calumny, contumely, libel, and the telling of secrets we are obliged to keep. I hear every one of these in the course of conversation during a typical week. And I must admit that as conscious as I try to be, I violate the eighth commandment myself on a regular basis. As far as I can recall, I've never violated it to a mortal degree, but I do violate it.

At the end of the day, the best way to keep the eighth commandment is to remember your mother's wise counsel when you were a kid. Remember? She told you to always tell the truth, and if you couldn't think of anything good to say you should keep your mouth shut. That's What We Believe... Why We Believe It.

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