

Saints and sinners: The seventh commandment means?

Thou shalt not steal. (Exodus 20:15 and Deuteronomy 5:19)

What does this mean?
 "We should fear and love God that we may not take our neighbor's money or goods, nor get them by false dealing, but help him to improve and protect his property and business" (Numberings and definition from Martin Luther's Small Catechism).

This commandment safeguarded private property. It went, however, beyond the simple taking of another's goods and is a moral law that is upheld by various religions. The Mishna, which is the teachings of the rabbis and the first section of the Talmud, also goes beyond defining stealing as just a criminal law by saying that there are "seven kinds of thieves, and the chief of all is he who deceives his fellow."

customers with the ancient version of "the thumb on the scales," the Mishna declared that the "shopkeeper must wipe his measures twice a week, his weights once a week, and his scales after every weighing."

Quite apart from any criminal penalties, Jewish moral law also taught that one who steals could not receive God's forgiveness until he had first atoned for his sin to the injured party. For stealing an ox, the reparation was five oxen if the ox had been killed or sold. If the ox was still recoverable when the thief was caught, he had to give it back plus two other oxen.

Under Luther's teachings, the Seventh Commandment was a "commands to rightdoing." It was not enough that we don't steal from our neighbor or cheat him. We must also "help him to improve and protect his property and business."

The Seventh Commandment was one of



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• saints & sinners

those that Luther found implicit in the prohibitions of wrongdoings found in the commandments. He taught that our first concern must not be with obtaining things but with helping others. This gives a needed corrective to our modern philosophy of getting ahead "by hook or by crook" or "every man for himself."

Are we becoming a nation of thieves? Some fear we are and I have even heard some say in passing that if another depression comes it will not be accompanied by people selling apples on

street corners as they did during the Great Depression or standing patiently in soup lines. With today's mindset, some fear a severe economic depression could result in angry mobs storming stores and taking what they feel is theirs.

But there may be a way to prevent that, because, when you think about it, none of us succeeds or fails on his or her own. The joy and happiness we feel, the sadness and failure we experience — these things are usually related in some way to other people in our lives.

Each of us is his "brother's keeper" — and we must keep track of our brother's welfare.

Other people do have a claim to our time and love, and when we withhold it from them, we are taking from them something that is rightfully theirs, even "stealing" it — especially with our children.

When we are too busy for our children, we are

taking from them their most precious possession. This is a kind of stealing that should concern us as much as burglary, shoplifting or cheating.

We have had "You can!" dinned into our ears so much by modern schooling or "self-improvement" philosophies that we have forgotten how to say "I can't" and have stretched ourselves too thin at the expense of loved ones.

So, in addition to merely following the Seventh Commandment at face value, try this: Say "I can't" whenever it appears that saying "I can" would mean "stealing" away the love and time you should be giving to others:

"I'd like to but I can't" — my mother wouldn't want me to."

"I'd like to but I can't" — it would mean spending too much time away from my children."

"I'd like to but I can't" — my wife (or husband) is expecting me home."

By housing world's largest angel museum, Wisconsin church spared

By Carrie Antflinger

Associated Press Writer

BELOIT, Wis. — A small museum that sits on the banks of the Rock River in southern Wisconsin is a heavenly spot for angel lovers.

The Beloit Angel Museum features more than 7,500 angel statues displayed wing-to-wing in a former Roman Catholic church that was spared destruction so it could house the figures.

They come in an amazing variety. There are angels made of resin, porcelain, drinking straws, pasta, coal, tin, ceramic, wood, papier mache, stained glass, pine cones, cornhusks, wax, clothes pins and seal skin. One was made from a dried apple.

There's a firefighter angel, a hunter, nurse, pilot, doctor, bride and groom. One angel is tipsy, another is a bobble-head doll and some are even posing

with devils.

Others double as bells, candles, candle holders, vases, smoke alarms, coasters, lipstick holders, pencil sharpeners and salt and pepper shakers.

The display has made the Guinness Book of World Records and includes angels from around the globe: Oprah Winfrey donated a collection of black angels.

In a sense, the angels saved the 98-year-old building where they are housed from being demolished.

"What I believe in my heart is the collection happened, the museum happened and it was something that was supposed to happen," said Joyce Berg, 71, who started the collection with her husband, Lowell, in 1976.

Their first two angels came from a Florida antique store.

"As we got involved it snowballed.

They just were so sweet and we got caught up in the many different kinds there were," Joyce Berg said. "It became a passion and it became our hobby."

The couple used to take about three vacations a year and would buy angels as souvenirs from angel conventions, antique malls or flea markets. They once came home with 165 angels.

The entire collection originally was displayed in their four-bedroom ranch house in Beloit, about 65 miles southwest of Milwaukee, but that became challenging — the Bergs had to remove doors and install shelves to display all the figures.

In July 1994, while out driving, they noticed St. Paul Catholic Church along the Rock River.

"When we drove past, the doors were open. ... The sun was shining right on them. It was like they jumped right out

because they were so noticeable," Joyce Berg said.

The parish was closed in 1988 after the death of its longtime pastor, and the Bergs learned the church was scheduled to be demolished in eight months if it wasn't put to good use.

The Bergs contacted the church's former parishioners, and submitted a museum plan to city officials, who approved it.

The church, now a historical landmark, was renovated with community development block grants, fund-raisers and volunteer help. The city owns the church and charges the museum \$1 a year for rent.

The museum opened May 1, 1998, and more than 54,000 visitors have passed through its doors since. The Bergs wouldn't say what the entire display is worth.

The museum actually has four different collections on display — the Bergs', Oprah's, a memorial collection (angels given by various people in memory of loved ones who passed away) and the museum collection, which includes angels from people who willed or donated their angels. The Bergs' is by far the largest.

Joyce Berg said she didn't start collecting angels because of religious beliefs.

"What I hope (people) get out of it is the pleasure and the peaceful feeling and the enjoyment," Berg said. "But I do know ... for a lot of people it is a religious experience."

Sandy Rauss, 33, of Black River Falls visited the museum recently with her cousin and took photographs of an angel quilt she donated about a year ago. The quilt names people close to her who have died.

She said she's visited the museum three or four times for religious and spiritual reasons.

"I think it's a great thing they've done," she said. "I've told a lot of people about it."

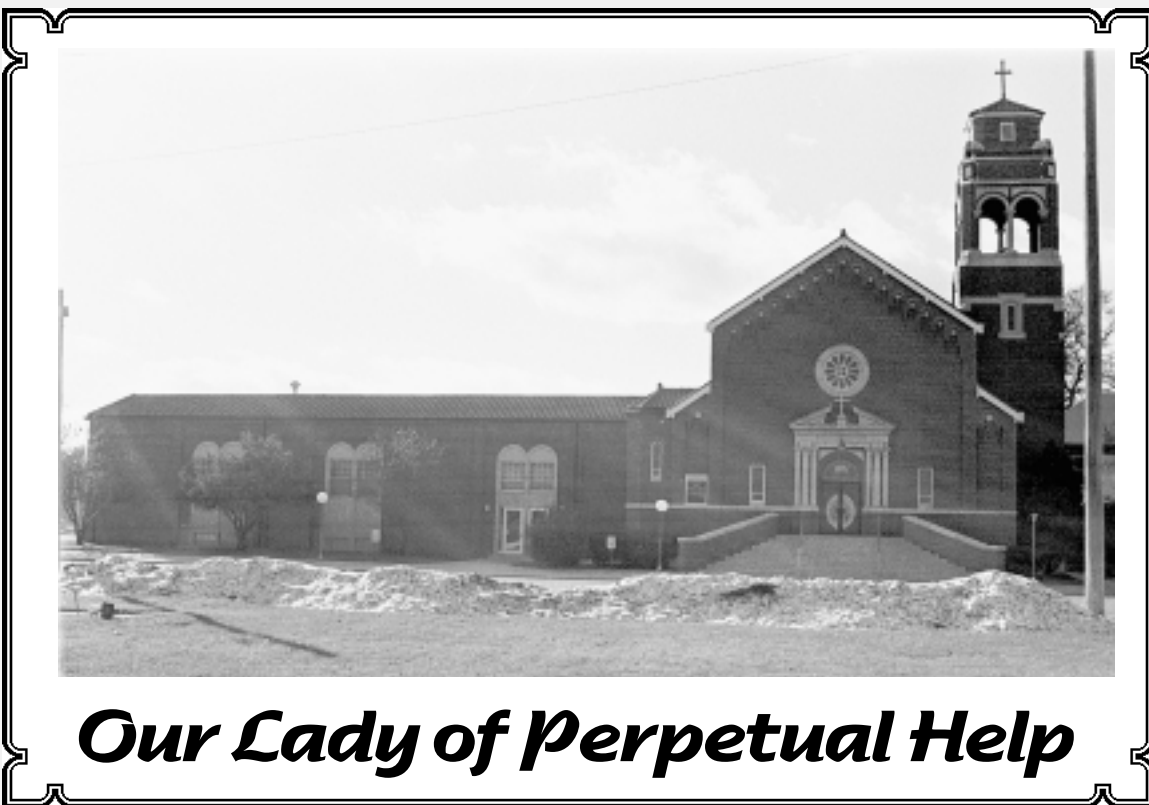
The Bergs still collect angels, though not as they use to.

"I guess you reach a point you realize that you can't buy every different angel because they are still making different ones," she said.

About 1,000 angels are still displayed at the Bergs' home — smaller representations of some at the museum, and angels with special meaning — and 4,000 are in home storage.

The rest of the angels are on permanent loan to the museum.

"As long as there is an angel museum, our collection will be there," Berg said.



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First Baptist Church
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Youth Minister: Doug Bean
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 Junior/Senior High Meeting: 7 pm
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Kanorado
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Pastor: Leonard Cox
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Wednesday: Call for location

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Pastor:
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 Sunday School: 9:45 am CST
Winona:
Minister: Rev. Bob Winters
 Worship Service: 9 am CST
 Sunday School: 10:15 am CST

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Sunday: Sunday School: 10 am

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