"If you choose you can keep the commandments."
If you choose, you CAN keep the commandments!

Some people think that it is impossible to keep the commandments, but the Bible disagrees with this view of the world:

If you choose, you can keep the commandments, all of them.

The third commandment, *keep holy the Lord's day*: “Oh,” someone might say, “it's so difficult to come to Mass each and every weekend! Let alone the Holy Days of Obligation. I'm so busy! There are so many other activities scheduled over the weekends!”

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The sixth commandment, *Thou shalt not commit adultery*: “But I don't feel that I love my spouse any longer. Instead, I have fallen in love with someone new. How can I not follow my heart?”

“If you choose you can keep the commandments.”

The seventh commandment, *Thou shalt not steal*: “I want to stop, but I steal because I'm addicted to drugs,” or, “to gambling. Is it really possible for me to overcome this habit of sin in my life?”

“If you choose you can keep the commandments.” You really can, with God's help. This is what He promises by teaching us in this passage of Scripture that we can keep the commandments.

Recently I was speaking with some first-graders about the fourth commandment, *Honor thy father and thy mother*. About how important it is to listen to mom and dad, to do what they ask without complaining, and even to do things without being asked: like how if you know that mom and dad would want you to pick up your toys when you're done playing with them, how much it shows your love for them if you do it even before they ask you to. As we were finishing our discussion of *honor thy father and mother*, one of the girls in the class asked, “Is there a
commandment about **brothers and sisters**?"

Without missing a beat, one of the little boys said: “Yeah: *Thou shalt not kill!*”

That little boy was on to something. God's commandments really do give us guidance for the whole of life. And this is what Jesus teaches us in today's Gospel:

“You have heard that it was said [...] You shall not kill; and whoever kills will be liable to judgment. But I say to you, whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment.”

What many took to be a prohibition only against murder, Jesus teaches to be a prohibition even against harboring resentment and anger in our hearts.

“You have heard that it was said, You shall not commit adultery. But I say to you, everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. [...] I say to you, whoever divorces his wife—unless the marriage is unlawful—causes her to commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”

What many took to be a prohibition against being unfaithful in marriage, Jesus teaches to be something much broader: not only is marrying a divorced person—unless that first 'marriage' has been ruled 'unlawful' or *invalid* by a Church Tribunal—not only is marrying a divorced person a state of public and permanent adultery, but what is more, this commandment touches on a whole range of moral teachings: not only is the Christian forbidden from committing adultery, but the Christian is also forbidden from giving in to lust and self-pleasure, from viewing pornography, from using contraception, from having sex outside of marriage, and so on.

And whatever other commandment there may be, Jesus says to us, “Whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments [...] will be called least in the kingdom of heaven.” “I tell you,” He says, “unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of Heaven.” The scribes and Pharisees were known for fastidiously observing even the *smallest details* of the law, and Jesus says that if we want to enter Heaven, **we have to be more righteous than they were!**, because we have to allow God's law to shape not only our *actions* and *decisions* but even our *thoughts* and our *desires*. 
Is it possible to live this way?
   It is possible to live this way?

“If you choose you can keep the commandments.”

If we thought that Jesus was going to make things easier for us, easier than the Ten Commandments and the law God gave in the Old Testament, tonight we heard Jesus say: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law […] I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. Amen, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or the smallest part of a letter will pass from the law.” Jesus really does expect us to keep the whole moral law as proposed and taught by the Church. But He knows our human weakness, and so He has given us the Sacraments. He teaches us in tonight's Gospel a beautiful lesson about the Sacrament of Reconciliation:

“If you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”

When Christ speaks of the 'gift you bring to the altar,' He is speaking about not just the bread and wine that become his Body and Blood, and still less about the money that you put in the basket when it comes around, but He's speaking about the gift of your heart. When you come to Mass, when the bread and wine are placed on the altar, can you put your heart on the altar? Can you give your whole heart to God? Because this is what it means to keep the commandments. And if there's anything that divides your heart—if you have given a part of your heart to resentment or to lust or to selfish desires rather than to God—“Go first,” Christ says, “and be reconciled.” If we have failed to keep the commandments, the Sacrament of Reconciliation is there for us. Indeed, even if we've failed in a truly spectacular way, committed a mortal sin: that is reason to “leave your gift there at the altar,” to refrain from receiving Holy Communion until we have followed Christ's command to “go first and be reconciled [...], and then come and offer your gift,”—but yes, even if we've failed in some particularly humiliating fashion, nothing can separate us from the love of God.

The moral law seems difficult to keep, and “God's wisdom” in this is sometimes “mysterious and hidden,” but the Scriptures teach us that
   “If you choose you can keep the commandments, [and] they will save you.”