

Living the Catholic Moral Life

There are four things that I want to talk tonight:

1. The Evaluation of Human Acts
2. Helps to Living a Moral Life
3. The Gifts and Fruit of the Holy Spirit
4. Finally, in the next class, I'll review what is commanded and what is forbidden,

specifically by the Ten Commandments, Given by God to Moses. Since these Ten Commandments constitute the moral guidelines, that - as we shall see tonight - in their essential elements oblige all people at all times and in every place.

Objective

To understand the process of conscience formation and recognize the dignity that comes from choosing the good and living the life of virtue.

For some of us, our first encounter with conscience may have been the movie *Pinocchio*, where the wise Jimmy Cricket exhorts our hero to "let conscience be his guide." For others, it may have been an elementary catechism class, where we learned that conscience is a "little voice" inside us helping us to sort out right from wrong. Whatever the source, animated by Disney or supernatural grace—or likely a combination of the two—we learned early on that it is a very good and even necessary thing to follow our conscience.

As we develop a more mature understanding of Christian morality, we still recognize our fundamental obligation to follow our conscience. The Church teaches that conscience is a privileged place within us where God speaks to us. Conscience gives us the framework for making good, loving choices and shunning evil impulses and temptations. Even on a natural level we encounter the workings of conscience, as pagans and Christians alike have experienced a sense "deep down" that something just is—or is not—the right thing to do.

For Christians, of course, conscience goes beyond those elements of the natural law that are accessible to every human heart (cf. Rom. 2:14-15): The more our conscience is formed by the teachings of Christ and his Church, the more our conscience becomes finely attuned to all that is true, good, and beautiful.

And conscience is not merely a window to the natural law, but a place where we actually encounter the living God. The Gospel warns us against professing belief in the Lord while failing to do what he says (Luke 6:46). What good would it be, for example, for our conscience to tell us it is wrong to defraud our creditors if we have no intention to act upon such guidance? It would be like driving at night without using our headlights. Such a reckless approach would inevitably lead to disaster.

Therefore, it is clear that we have a serious duty to do what we believe is right in God's eyes, and this entails heeding our conscience. As the Church teaches, our dignity and even our eternal destiny lie in our obedience to God's voice within us

What we choose determines who we become.

Choosing what is good changes the chooser, empowering him or her to proceed along the pathways of virtue and develop the habitus - or habits- which promote Christian character.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church addresses human choice, action and freedom: *The more one does what is good, the freer one becomes. There is no true freedom except in the service of what is good and just. The choice to disobey and do evil is an abuse of freedom and leads to "the slavery of sin"*.

The Evaluation of Human Acts

Moral Conscience

- The word “Conscience” comes from Latin meaning “with knowledge”
- Conscience is a practical judgement by the use of reason that tells us in a concrete situation what our moral obligation is.
- As children, our parents might have said, “you know better than that” after we did something we knew was wrong.
- During the moral decision-making process, one is not only in self conversation, but is in direct dialog with God.

Conscience Formation

- Conscience formation is a lifelong process; moral conscience is in need of continual conversion toward what is good and true.
- Just like working out in the gym. You need to keep at it to get results
- Key contributors to the formation of a right conscience include: Natural Law, the Ten Commandments, the teaching of Christ, and the teaching of the Spirit-led Church.
- Parents stand responsible before God to make sure that their children have well-informed conscience.
- People that want to join the Catholic Church have the responsibility to know what the Church teaches beforehand to guarantee a conscience that is truly well informed.
- A traditional Catholic practice is to frequently examine one’s conscience to decide whether or not one is following the path to the Truth.
- Some scripture passages that are helpful:
 - Exodus 20:1-17 & Deuteronomy 5:6-21 - Ten Commandments
 - Matthew 5:1-12 - Sermon on the Mount
 - Galatians 5:16-26 - Walk with the Spirit

Choosing in accord with conscience

- People have the right to act in conscience and in freedom so as personally to make moral decisions.
- Conscience can make either a right judgment in accordance with reason and the divine law or, on the contrary, an erroneous judgment that departs from them.

- In making judgements, some rules apply in every case:
 - One may never do evil so that good may result from it; *End Justify the Means*
 - The Golden Rule: "Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them."
 - Charity above all else

End Justify the Means

Example #1:

Campaigning with illegal funds on the theory that if he wins the election the end will justify the means

Example #2:

Volkswagon stated a clear goal that they wanted to be the world's largest automaker; a goal they achieved in the first half of 2015. Prior to reaching that goal, they realized that in order to be number one, they had to excel (or at least compete) in particular market niches.

Clean diesel was one of those niches. They wanted their cars to have lower emissions than the others. They wanted to advertise that, they wanted to capitalize on that.

And they certainly did. Successfully.

However, as we know, in order to do that, they had to deliberately falsify emissions tests. Their diesel cars were emitting 40 times the allowed level (U.S.) of nitrogen oxides. That clearly was an issue they had to fix. However, in order to fix it, they didn't actually fix the emissions these cars were producing, they installed a software ("defeat devices") that made them appear to test better than they actually did.

And that helped get them to the number one car company in the world.

Until they were caught. The U.S. authorities could (in theory) impose up to \$18US billion penalties. Add all the other countries, owners, dealers etc. into the penalty structure and you have a massive amount of money ... all for the sake of selling cars.

Example #3:

Many people dislike NSA for their mass surveillance. Does their goal of fighting terrorism justifies the means which are often considered unpleasant breach of privacy?

Example #4:

Many historians would use a famous example of nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki which killed over 100.000 innocent people but helped stopping horrific World War II which would have killed even more innocent people if it had been continued.

- A right conscience is well-formed and is in alignment with the Truth.

- We all strive to have the right conscience.
- A certain conscience passes judgement on the good or evil of an act without science can be wrong.
- A person cannot act with a doubtful conscience: "I'm not sure what is right." The doubt must be resolved. Some suggestions might be:
 - Study the objective teaching
 - Pray for guidance
 - List the pros and cons for doing the act
 - Check with the priest for counsel
- A person with a lax conscience rationalizes their actions
- A person with a scrupulous conscience obsessively and compulsively sees sin where there is none.
- Erroneous judgment is often our own fault, and can have many causes (from Catechism, 1791-2):
 - Lack of care in forming our conscience or our powers of reason
 - Misunderstanding conscience
 - Damage caused by repeated and habitual sin
 - Following the bad example of others
 - Rejection of Church teaching
 - Ignorance of Christ and the Gospels
 - Neglecting the work of our conversion to Christ
 - Neglect of charity

The Morality of Human Acts

- Freedom makes each one of us a moral subject - "They are good or evil"
- The morality or immorality of human act depend on three factors:
 - the object chosen;
 - the end in view or the intention;
 - the circumstances of the action.

The **object** is the thing with which the action is essentially concerned, for example, lying, praying the rosary, stealing, helping a blind person cross the street. For a morally good act, the object of it must be good, that is, the thing with which the action is concerned must conform to the law of God.

The **circumstances** of the act are the second determinant of the morality of any action. The circumstances are such things as the person involved, the time, the place, the occasion, which are distinct from the object, but can change or completely alter its moral tone. Circumstances can make an otherwise good action evil, as when a soldier deliberately goes to sleep. They can increase the guilt, as when a girl lies to her mother; or minimize the guilt, as an unpremeditated lie in order to get out of an embarrassing situation. Since all human actions occur at a certain time and at a certain place, the circumstances must always be considered in evaluating the moral quality of any human act.

The third determinant of the moral quality of any human act is the **intention** or end or purpose. Every human act, no matter how trivial, is done for some purpose.

The Sunday driver who blocks traffic and seems to be driving aimlessly has a purpose: he may not be going anywhere definite but he does seek the joy of just driving around and looking.

For a human act to be morally good the agent or doer must have a good intention -- he must want to accomplish something that is good in one way or another. Some actions, like blasphemy and stealing, are always wrong and no purpose, no matter how noble, can make them good. Other actions may be either good or bad, depending on why we do them. Taking a drink is not sinful; drinking in order to get drunk is. The morality of many things that we do is determined by the intention -- such as walking, talking, reading, and so forth. Many such activities are said to be indifferent morally in themselves, but they receive their moral quality from the intention behind them.

For our actions to be good our intention must be good. It is good to help the poor, but if I donate to the poor out of vanity or from revenge, then it is not a good act even though, incidentally, the poor are helped. On the other hand, we must avoid the common contemporary error of thinking that the whole morality of any action is determined by the intention. The most noble intention cannot make an intrinsically evil action a good action. Thus, the bombings and killings perpetrated by terrorists in order to change some form of government are still murder. Stealing from the rich in order to help the poor a la Robin Hood is still stealing. The idea that "the end justifies the means" is very common today. Good by ill-advised people who are concerned about over-population or the proper raising of children resort to abortion in order to cut down on the number of births and to avoid unwanted children. But a good intention, no matter what it is, does not make something essentially evil, such as abortion, into something morally good.

- A morally good act requires the goodness of its object, of its end, and of its circumstances together.
- In the *Splendor of Truth*, Pope John Paul II teaches: "The primary and decisive element for moral judgement is the **object of the human act**, which establishes whether its is *capable of being ordered to the good and to the ultimate end, which is God*."

- The Church teaches that some acts are always evil: homicide, genocide, abortion, euthanasia, or voluntary suicide.
- Pope John Paul II says in *Splendor of Truth*, “If acts are intrinsically evil, a good intention or particular circumstances can diminish their evil, they they cannot remove it”
- An objectively evil act is not always sinful. To be so, it must be committed with full knowledge and complete consent.
- Every knowingly chosen act, without any exception, has three sources of morality. When all three sources are good, the act is moral; it is at least morally permissible. When any one or more sources is bad, the act is immoral; it is a sin to knowingly choose such an act.

The Morality of the Passions

- “The term ‘passions’ refers to the affections or the feelings”
- “In themselves passions are neither good nor evil”
- “Emotions and feelings can be taken up in the virtues or prevented by the vices”

Helps to Living a Moral Life

“A virtue is an habitual and firm disposition to do the good. It allows the person not only to perform good acts, but to give the best of himself”

The word “virtue” is derived from the Latin word *virtus* meaning “strength” or “courage.” Compassion, responsibility, a sense of duty, self-discipline and restraint, honesty, loyalty, friendship, courage, and persistence are examples of desirable virtues for sustaining a moral life.

To be a virtuous person means to possess the strength of great human power.

Cardinal Virtues

- We group the human virtues around what are called the Cardinal Virtues. This term comes from the Latin word *cardo* meaning “hinge.”
- All the virtues are related to or hinged to one of the Cardinal Virtues.
- The four **Cardinal Virtues** are Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, and Temperance.
- There is a reciprocal relationship between virtue and acts because virtue, as an internal reality, disposes us to act externally in morally good ways.

- Yet it is through doing good acts in the concrete that the virtue within us is strengthened and grows.
 - Prudence
 - Justice
 - Fortitude
 - Temperance

The moral virtues grow through education, deliberate acts, and perseverance in struggle. Grace purifies and elevates them

The Theological Virtues

- **Theological Virtues** of faith, hope, and charity (love) are those virtues that relate directly to God. These are not acquired through human effort but, beginning with Baptism, they are infused within us as gifts from God.
- Unlike the cardinal virtues, which can be practiced by anyone, the theological virtues are gifts of grace from God, and the object of the virtues—what the practice of the virtue aims at—is God Himself.
 - Faith
 - Hope
 - Charity (love)

Each of the Ten Commandments forbids certain sins, but each also points to virtues that will help us avoid such sins

The Gifts And Fruits Of The Holy Spirit

- The moral life of Christians is sustained by the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit

1. **Wisdom:** It is the capacity to love spiritual things more than material ones; it also means the want to understand God. It is the perfection of the theological virtue of faith;
2. **Understanding:** In understanding, we comprehend how we need to live as followers of Christ. A person with understanding is not confused by the conflicting messages in our culture about the right way to live. The gift of understanding perfects a person's speculative reason in the apprehension of truth. It is the gift whereby self-evident principles are known;
3. **Counsel (right judgement):** With the gift of counsel/right judgment, we know the difference between right and wrong, and we choose to do what is right. A person with right judgment avoids sin and lives out the values taught by Jesus Christ. It is the perfection of the cardinal

virtue of prudence;

4. **Fortitude** (courage): With the gift of fortitude/courage, we overcome our fear and are willing to take risks as a follower of Jesus Christ. A person with courage is willing to stand up for what is right in the sight of God, even if it means accepting rejection, verbal abuse, or physical harm. The gift of courage allows people the firmness of mind that is required both in doing good and in enduring evil. It is the perfection of the cardinal virtue of the same name;
5. **Knowledge**: With the gift of knowledge, we understand the meaning of God. The distinction between wisdom and knowledge is that wisdom gives the desire to know the things of God, whereas knowledge is the actual power by which such things are known. The gift of knowledge is more than an accumulation of facts, it also helps us to choose the right path through life;
6. **Piety** (reverence): With the gift of piety/reverence, we have a deep sense of respect for God and the Church. A person with reverence recognizes our total reliance on God and comes before God with humility, trust, and love. According to St. Thomas Aquinas, it is the perfection of the virtue of religion. Piety is the gift whereby, at the Holy Spirit's instigation, we pay worship and duty to God as our Father, as Aquinas writes;
7. **Fear of the Lord** (wonder and awe): With the gift of fear of the Lord/wonder and awe, we are aware of the glory and majesty of God. A person with wonder and awe knows that God is the perfection of all we desire: perfect knowledge, perfect goodness, perfect power, and perfect love. This gift is described by Aquinas as a fear of separating oneself from God. He describes the gift as a "filial fear," like a child's fear of offending his father, rather than a "servile fear," that is, a fear of punishment. Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. It is the perfection of the theological virtue of hope.

The liturgical text for the Rite of Confirmation makes mention of the seven gift of the Holy Spirit at the invocation of the Holy Spirit, prior to the anointing with Holy Chrism. Thus, one preparing to receive any of the Sacraments of Initiation thou be well aware of the great gifts which they are about to receive.

The fruits of the Holy Spirit are supernatural works or perfections that are done with ease as signs of the Holy Spirit working within us. "The tradition of the Church lists twelve of them: 'charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, chastity'"

Questions we attempted to answer:

Why is conscience formation a lifelong process?

The education of the conscience is a lifelong task. From the earliest years, it awakens the child to the knowledge and practice of the interior law recognized by conscience. Prudent

education teaches virtue; it prevents or cures fear, selfishness and pride, resentment arising from guilt, and feelings of complacency, born of human weakness and faults. The education of the conscience guarantees freedom and engenders peace of heart.

Why doesn't the "end" justify the "means"?

A good intention (for example, that of helping one's neighbor) does not make behavior that is intrinsically disordered, such as lying and calumny, good or just. The end does not justify the means. Thus the condemnation of an innocent person cannot be justified as a legitimate means of saving the nation. On the other hand, an added bad intention (such as vainglory) makes an act evil that, in and of itself, can be good (such as almsgiving).

I don't need your Church's rules. My conscience tells me what's right and what's wrong. All I have to do is follow my conscience.

Not exactly. Conscience is the faculty that warns you you're doing something wrong or neglecting to do something you should be doing. But it doesn't work in a vacuum. Your conscience first must be told what's right and wrong—it starts out as an empty slate—and that's a job for your intellect. If you learn that stealing is no sin, and if you really believe it, your conscience won't bother you when you rob a bank. If you learn that fornication is not sinful, no warning bells will go off when you engage in it. In either case your conscience will have been formed improperly.

Although you have a duty to follow your conscience, you have a prior duty to form your conscience well. You do this through following the moral teaching of the Church, through prayer, and through close attention to Scripture. Neglect those, and you will end up with either an empty conscience, which won't be able to guide you at all, or with a cramped conscience, which will see sin where there is no sin.

In addition to the Ten Commandments, the Church has six rules, called precepts:

1. Attending Mass on Sundays and on holy days of obligation
2. Receiving the Eucharist at least once a year during Lent or Easter
3. Celebrating Reconciliation (Confession) at least once a year if necessary
4. Fasting & Abstaining on certain days following the rules
5. Contributing to the support of the pastor & parish as possible
6. Observing the laws of the Church concerning marriage contracts.

Let me ask you a question.... What is the purpose of Morality?

- Protect Life
- Harmony

Why do parents give you rules?

- They love you
- Protect you

The purpose of Morality is Happiness. The whole purpose that god gives us laws is so that we are happy.

Virtues

If you want to live a good life if you want to be a human being to be happy in the deep sense of the word, not merely having a good day, but flourishing then the key word is virtues. That's what we are going to talk about tonight.

If you want a happy life, you have to have virtues.

Means between excess and defect

Virtues is a good habit.

What's a Vice? A bad habit.

How do you build a Virtues?

Aristotle said, "Men become builders by building any lyre players by playing the lyre; so too we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts."

So to get the virtue of telling the truth by start telling the truth.

You build... Such as running...

When you repeat an action many times, it becomes second nature.

Virtues make difficult things easy.

Example: Working out. You need to build muscle to lift 250 pounds.