

morality & justice

GUIDING LIGHT

How do you determine what is right and wrong? What principles did you use to guide you?

When we are presented with a decision that has some weight to it, we rely on an internal set of rules to determine how we act. We call these rules our “morals.” When we talk about how we determine “right” and “wrong” more broadly, we call that “morality.” The moral code that people follow might be impacted by all kinds of things — we may keep the same moral code as our parents because we admire them or actively go against their moral code because we want to rebel against them. Life experience may have formed our morality, and we may share the same morals as our friends.

Is there a right and a wrong, though, when it comes to morality? We used various standards to judge each situation and sometimes they led us to the same action, while other times they led us to a different action. Was any person wrong in their decision?

Some decisions have no right or wrong answer; when we talk about our preferences, there is not a right answer — everyone can be “right” in their own way. But when we talk about more important things like how we treat other people, ways in which we respect life, and what laws are good and just and what ones are not, there is a right answer and a wrong answer.

This might be difficult to hear; morality increasingly seems to be something we believe we can “personally define,” and to be clear,

we do need to personally chose how we live. The question is not if we can choose our own moral code; the question is how we determine the best way to live. This is a big question. Our morality determines how we act and the kind of person we are. If we want to live well, our morality matters.

discussion questions

Do you find it easy or hard to know what to do in a situation? What situations are easy to know what is right? What situations are more difficult?

What kind of person do you want to be?

THE MORAL CODE OF THE TEACHER

As followers of Jesus, we have a morality that we can choose and that was defined and given to us by Jesus, Himself. Our moral code as Christians is written throughout the Gospels and is clarified and applied by the Catholic Church. Our job, as disciples, is to understand that moral teaching and apply it to our lives.

There is no small number of people who question why we should live the moral teaching of Christ and the Church, especially when it seems contrary to what is culturally acceptable. Jesus, as the Son of God, has the authority to make definitive teaching about the best way for us to live. This teaching is guarded by the Church, which Christ gives authority to interpret His teachings for each era of human existence.

The group of people who guard this teaching is called “the Magisterium.” It is made up of bishops who prayerfully discern how to apply the teaching of Christ to modern day issues. Jesus did not speak on some of the things we deal with in modern society, not because they were not important but because people would not have understood what He was teaching. Instead, Jesus preached using universal images the Church is able to apply to modern moral situations.

Jesus’ teachings are the foundation of the Church’s moral teaching. The

Church does not have the authority to change the teachings of Christ; she only has authority to apply them as new social and moral situations arise.

discussion questions

What laws and moral codes do we have in our secular world are rooted in the teachings of Jesus?

What Church teachings on morality do you struggle with? How can you seek to understand them?

VIRTUE & VICE

There are many moral situations the Church speaks in to. The Church also identifies broad areas of positive and negative moral living. We call positive moral behaviors “virtues” and negative moral behaviors “vices.” There are classic virtues and sins that can help us understand Christ’s teachings and the ways in which the Church calls us to live.

The seven virtues are love, hope, faith, justice, temperance, fortitude, and prudence. The seven vices are pride, gluttony, sloth, lust, greed, envy, and anger. We can view much of our morality through these vices and virtues.

Virtue is a moral quality that we work on with God’s grace. When we live the virtue of love, loving God and our neighbor, we make decisions that bring us in alignment with Jesus’ teaching. One way we would practice the virtue of love is by serving those who experience poverty. Love is self-sacrificial, so by giving up time on a Saturday to serve at a shelter for people who are homeless we love our neighbor well. At the same time, we also combat the vice of greed — instead of being selfish, we are self-less.

Vice often happens when we become deficient in an area of virtue. When we fail to love, we can become greedy, lustful, envious, or

angry. When we fail to have hope, we become slothful. When we fail to practice temperance, we become gluttonous.

Vices and virtues are practical ways we can view morality. We need to remember, though, that all virtue is rooted in the grace that Jesus gives us and is clarified by Church teaching.

So, take the virtue of love. If someone is doing something sinful but we do not want to call them out on it because we think it would not be loving, we are not living the virtue. Likewise, in our romantic relationships, we can confuse the virtue of love with the vice of lust by telling ourselves that sexual intimacy with our partner is morally OK because we "love them." When we examine that feeling against Church teachings, though, we see that we are actually engaging in a vice rather than a virtue.

Jesus calls us to live moral and upright lives. He calls us to be disciples who follow Him and His example. The Church guides us along that path, which is ultimately freedom. Each person here is called to that same freedom, but it is up to us to cooperate with God's grace in order to truly find it.

COMPLETE THE VIRTUE & VICE EXAMINATION ACTIVITY ON THE NEXT PAGE AND THEN CONTINUE WITH THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AFTER EVERYONE HAS COMPLETED IT.

discussion questions

Which marks on the examination are you most surprised by?

Think about the three virtues you have the most. What specific kinds of choices do you make that help you cultivate these virtues?

Think about the three virtues you have the least. What choices lead you away from virtue? What specific kinds of choices can you make to help you cultivate those virtues?

EXAMINATION ACTIVITY

virtue & vice

Virtues are traits or qualities that are morally good and are, therefore, valued as the foundation of a good life. With each virtue, determine if you are deficient, have excellence, or are in excess, and mark this on the handout. As you go through the list, choose at least three virtues you live well. Circle these. Then choose three virtues you struggle to live well. Draw a star next to these.

Deficient	Excellence of Virtue	Excess
Cowardly	Courage	Bravado, Rashness
Does not enjoy or take pleasure in the created things of life	Temperance: Has moderation or self-restraint when enjoying things	Gluttonous, overindulgent
Stingy: Reluctant to share what one has	Generosity	Wasteful
Dark, vulgar	Disposition of Joy: Has an authentically radiant and joyful way of living	Has an overly positive and shallow attitude
Downplays or diminishes oneself and one's accomplishments	Proper pride in oneself	Vain, arrogant
Indolent: Lazy, avoids working hard	Proper ambition	Overambitious, overworking
Fearful	Patience	Impulsive
Dishonest, deceitful	Truthfulness	Over shares, tactless
Boorish	Wittiness	Facetious
Reluctant to share oneself or connect with others	Friendship: Being a true friend to someone	Desperate to be liked, tries to reach deep friendship with every person
Fickle: Changes frequently, especially in regard to one's loyalties, interests, or affection	Loyalty	Gullible: Easily taken advantage of
Intolerant	Tolerance: Appropriately accepts others and their differences	Taken advantage of
Permissive: Grants permission for people to do anything	Justice: Knows, does, and advocates for what is right	Legalistic: Adheres excessively to law or formula

GOOD HABIT

Catholic morality is not simply following rules. It is about growing in virtues that make us the best, holiest versions of ourselves. Virtues are habitual and firm dispositions to do the good. Not a general “good,” but THE good: God’s definition of good.

Justice is a human virtue — a virtue that can be acquired through human effort. As justice is fundamental to moral goodness, it is also a cardinal virtue — one of four virtues from which all other human virtues flow.

Justice is the virtue by which we constantly, firmly desire to give God and our neighbor what is due to them. True justice means having right relationship with God and one another — knowing and loving God for who He is and loving all human beings as His children.

We said virtues are habitual dispositions to do the good — habits! And habits are actions. The virtue of justice is not simply a theological idea. It requires actively serving God and neighbor so naturally that it is second nature. This is radically different than the revenge that society calls “justice.” How can we bring God’s justice to our broken and hurting world? Our first steps must be prayer and the sacraments.

ST. TERESA OF CALCUTTA

"I used to pray that God would feed the hungry, or do this or that, but now I pray that He will guide

me to do whatever I am supposed to do, what I can do. I used to pray for answers, but now I am praying for strength. I used to believe that prayer changes things, but now I know that prayer changes us and we change things."

We sometimes hear that prayer does not affect the wrongs in the world. As Catholics, we know this is not true. We know that God can and does act toward our good in ways we cannot see. But, as with all things in our faith, God asks for our participation. We are Christ’s hands and feet in the world. He calls us to work toward justice and fight the sins that create injustice wherever and whenever we can.

Living out true justice is a struggle. There are many people who disagree with Catholicism’s view of justice and are quick to condemn and attack. We need the virtue of prudence, strengthened in Confirmation to know what is truly just and to act accordingly.

discussion questions

How have you actively served God and your neighbor? How can you live out justice more?

SOCIAL JUSTICE WARRIOR

As we grow in justice, the Church guides us spiritually with the sacraments and prayer. However, the Church also gives practical guidance, explaining how to act justly. She encourages us to pursue social justice — a society where everyone knows what is good, works toward that good, and helps each other along that path.

Social justice starts with a fundamental respect for the human person. Living justly means respecting others and their rights — not the rights bestowed by a country or institution, but the rights that flow from their dignity as children of God.

When speaking about rights, it is easy to think politically, but Christ calls us beyond politics. We must try to wipe away our prejudices and love others as we love ourselves. We must especially care for the disadvantaged and those who think and act differently than us, as we can easily feel they are less deserving.

Social justice also requires acknowledging our equality and our differences. As children of God, we all have equal dignity and equal, God-given rights. But despite our equal dignity, our lives do not play out equally. Some face natural inequalities — age, physical abilities, intellectual abilities, and

more — that are a part of God's plan. Others face inequalities that are the consequences of sin. Whether or not these sinful inequalities impact us personally, we must fight against them for the sake of those affected.

Solidarity is another vital part of social justice, totally changing whom and why we serve. When we serve those in need, we sometimes see them as projects rather than people. We sometimes help simply for the sake of helping. Solidarity teaches that we are one human family. Remembering this, we realize nothing in this world is truly our own — everything is a gift from God. Solidarity allows us to freely, unselfishly share material and spiritual goods with one another.

The Church offers so much guidance regarding how to act justly and create a just society. These concepts, the Ten Commandments, and the Beatitudes are just starting points. Catholic social teaching is another great resource. Catholic social teaching provides seven principles that more concretely outline what a just society looks like.

THE SEVEN THEMES OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

- 1:** *Life & Dignity of the Human Person*
- 2:** *Call to Family, Community, & Participation*
- 3:** *Rights & Responsibilities*
- 4:** *Option for the Poor & Vulnerable*
- 5:** *The Dignity of Work & the Rights of Workers*
- 6:** *Solidarity*
- 7:** *Care for God's Creation*

With all this, though, we must remember that the Church not only speaks about justice; she lives out justice, too. The Church is always speaking on behalf of people in need. Pope Francis is a great example of this. If you want to change our world but do not know where to start, look to the Church and stand up for justice with her.

God made us unique and gave us unique callings. We all have different passions when it comes to social justice. Discover yours! Look at your deepest concerns about our world and learn how you can help. We must remember, though, that we are working toward the common good: a just society for all. With that, some justice issues are more urgent or fundamental than others.

Pro-life issues are a good example. The right to life is the basis for all other rights. And, based on the numbers alone, abortion is an issue that requires urgent attention. But people who see the Church as simply anti-abortion are mistaken. While she cares deeply about the unborn, the Church's pro-life stance covers many issues and causes the Church to speak out against all violence and threats to human life and dignity.

Christ and the Church show us, both in word and action, that caring for those in greatest need is not optional. Justice is a main mission of Christ and the Church

and must become one of our main missions as well.

Confirmation and the Holy Spirit are about faith in action. Preparing for Confirmation is the perfect time to learn more about the Church's teachings on justice and causes you can fight for. Use the graces you receive in Confirmation to change our world.

discussion questions

How have you seen the Church respond to social justice issues? What additional ways could the Church act?

What are some social justice issues that God has given you a passion for?

SUPPORTING SCRIPTURE:
MATTHEW 25:34-40

CLOSING PRAYER

intercessory rosary

Pick 10 intentions related to social justice issues to pray a decade of the rosary for.

Some possible intentions include:

- The unborn
- Those enslaved by human trafficking
- An end to euthanasia
- Refugees
- The homeless
- An end to gun violence
- An end to racism
- Growth in a chaste culture
- Those experiencing racism
- Strength in discipleship to uphold life's dignity

How to Pray:

Hail Mary, Full of Grace, The Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now, and at the hour of death. Glory Be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.