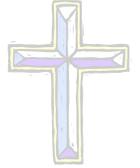


CHRIST and my conscience

Grade 8 • Class 3

Studying what the Lord teaches us about sexuality



Introduction

General aim of the lesson

Years of adolescence are often years of confusion. But young people do want to be good. They have high standards for others, and they want to be honest and live by high standards themselves. Yet the world does much to confuse their ideas of right and wrong. Often they let themselves be led astray and feel that it is all right to do things that their peers do because they often do not *feel* bad about doing such things. This lesson is intended to help them in something of greatest importance to their lives: in coming to realize what conscience really is, and how they can be radically honest in facing what is truly good or truly bad in the shaping of their own lives.

Specific objectives

1. To help students get a clear and honest understanding of what conscience is, and of the importance of a good conscience.
2. To help them appreciate that what Christ teaches us about conscience is really true, and that my life will be more honest if I allow the Holy Spirit to guide my conscience.
3. To show how a good conscience keeps one from painful confusions, and tragic decisions, touching sexuality.
4. To explain that knowing how to confess embarrassing sins can be a great help for us in keeping our lives honestly in order.
5. To show the distinctive ways in which a Christian conscience helps our lives.
6. To show how the Holy Spirit prompts us to seek repentance and conversion.

These are the things we will talk about . . .

Outline of the lesson

Opening Prayer

1. Good persons recognize the importance of having and developing a good conscience.
2. Concerns about chastity are aided by a good and honest conscience.
3. The conscience of a Christian will always be guided by what Christ teaches.



Path through the lesson

Opening prayer

Catechist: Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of Your faithful, and kindle in them the fire of Your love.

Verse: Send forth Your Spirit and they shall be created.

Response: And You will make new the face of the earth.

(**Note:** The students are to say this. The teacher might have this written on the board).

Catechist: O God, You instruct the hearts of the faithful by the light of the Holy Spirit. Grant us, in the same Spirit, to have a taste for what is right, and always to rejoice in His consolation. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

(At the end of the prayer, it might be good to point out that this is another prayer we ought to know well by heart, and to pray often when things are confusing and we need to the help of God. It is good to pray before we go to confession, and before all important and trying times.)

1. The importance of a good conscience

In this first session the students are assisted in grasping the basic idea of conscience, and of how important it is to care about what is really good or really bad.

A) First, they are to recall how people commonly do the worst things, and make the greatest mistakes with their lives, when they fail to think honestly in their hearts about what is right or wrong. Go through the examples in the text, and ask the students for more examples. Be ready to help them with examples: People actually owned slaves, and treated other persons as “things” in this country, because they did not think honestly. Today many people have abortions, and kill their own tiny babies before they are born, because they do not think seriously.

B) We need to be ready to talk about whether what we are about to do is right. We might talk with our own hearts: “What would that mean?” Or we could talk with people we know are good, and care about us: “Would it be all right for me to do *this* ?” Or we could speak with Christ about this in our prayers. (Ask the students: How would Christ answer us if we did this? In what way are prayers for a better understanding of God’s will answered?)

C) In the paragraphs beginning with “*My conscience is . . .*” we talk with the students about what conscience is. Conscience is not concerned with “guilt feelings: or with self-righteous claims that “It seems all right to me.” To be conscientious one must be seriously concerned about what is really good and what is really bad. The catechist might want to read the beautiful (and very understandable) words that the Second Vatican Council says about conscience in *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 16 (“In the depths of his conscience...”).



Honest and dishonorable ways... These paragraphs remind the students of the need to be honest in thinking about their sins. Go carefully with them through these sections:

- My conscience tells me it is all right
- Everybody is doing it.

REFLECTION: About conscience

Ask the students the questions found in this exercise. Try to get them to *think seriously* about this matter. These days most people (including most young people) are inclined to think that because TV and other forms of media pressure them there is no such thing as “good” or “bad.” Things are only good or bad for the people who decide to count them as good or bad. This is a silly pattern of thought, but a common one. Still, young people can be liberated from it. Young people are basically realists. They have deep inclinations to admit that some things are really bad, some things really good. If we ask them intelligent questions about good and evil, they are quite capable of coming up with intelligent answers — answers that strengthen their faith.

2. How a good conscience faces sexuality

Often young people isolate their thoughts about sexuality from their thoughts about good and bad. They often half realize that they *should* ask themselves honest questions, and be more honest in their thoughts about sexuality. But unless they are helped to think seriously about sexuality and its consequences, they are likely to drift into ways of thinking and acting that are very bad for them.

Show them that Christ knew that sex is something important. He knew that even the ways we think about sexuality are important. Remind them of what Jesus says in Matthew 5:28. The world tends to press lustful thoughts and attitudes on young people. Some rock bands and entertainers make much money doing that. We should help our students *realize* that if we let our heads and hearts treat sex in shabby ways, it will hurt us, and hurt the ways we deal with other people.

Suggested are some of the ways in which students can learn to be more honest in thinking about sexual matters. Help them see how false and unfair to other people it is to go along with shabby ways of treating God's gift of sexuality.

Note: *Thoughts about confessing embarrassing sins* — The catechist should study this section carefully while preparing for this class. For many young people it is crucial that they realize that they do not have to live in confusion, and in bad faith, about sexual matters. They can have clear heads, and straightforward ways of thinking before God about these matters. They can get very clear answers to questions like these: Is it wrong to go to movies that are sexually arousing, or to spend time with obscene magazines? They can have very clear thoughts about how wrong it might be to do impure acts alone, or with someone else. We should tell them that trying to make good and honest confessions is a great help toward developing an honest and right conscience.



Note: Please read the *Guidelines* in preparing this lesson. Young people often fear going to confession because they are not sure of what to say. And often they have not managed to get clear thoughts about the whole business of sin, sorrow, and forgiveness. But this often has bitter results for them. They half-know that they have important sins to confess, and they know vaguely that they should not go to Communion until their serious sins are forgiven in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. But often they do go to Communion anyway, and end up feeling worse. They want to run away from the whole set of anxieties they have managed to create.

We need to reassure them, and help them see that they can have clear thoughts and straightforward conduct before the Lord.

The catechist should help them realize how easy it is to confess their sins, even when they are mixed up about things. Go through the paragraphs that give concrete suggestions on how to confess even embarrassing sins calmly and peacefully.

3. Christ's teaching and my conscience

One of the virtues young people most understand is being honest and being truthful. They expect people to be honest and truthful to them, and can be moved by appeals to honesty. This section provides another aspect of the crucially important matter of having an honest conscience.

Christ expects us to be honest and decent in our dealings with Him. If we know who He is, He expects us to take Him seriously. When He who is the Lord tells us what is good or bad, we can be very sure that He is right. If our peers do things that contradict the Lord, or if rock singers and entertainers urge us to do things the Lord warns us against, we know what we ought to do.

Think over well the passage about St. Peter (Matthew 16:21-24). St. Peter sincerely did not want to hear about the cross. But in his heart he knew that if Jesus told him something seriously, it must be true. Yet he tried to tell himself, and even Jesus, that he was wrong. Notice how seriously the Lord reprimanded him.

Jesus is gracious and kind. But if people know who He is, they have a strong duty to believe Him, and try to do the good things He urges us to do.

We should consider it a very disturbing thing when our "consciences" tell us to do things that are wrong. We have good consciences only if we are willing to follow truth of Christ.

Christ Himself teaches us through the Gospels, by Church tradition, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and the words of good people who urge us to be faithful to the teaching of Christ. To have a good conscience is to care about what is really good. Those who want their consciences to be right should listen to Christ always.

Tying things together

At the end of this lesson, it could be very useful to bring together the various parts of the lesson, as listed in the student's section. For further reference and background the catechist should consult the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: 1385-1395; 1420-1470; 1480; 1776-1794; 1806; 1849; 2490.