What is Morality?

- Morality is a system of rules that modifies our behavior in social situations.

- Morality comes into play when people interact with each other.

- It's about the doing of good instead of evil, and it sets a standard of virtuous conduct.
Morality

- Morality allows us to justify our actions because we share a system of values with others.

- In our society today we seem to lack “shared values” because people want to define their own morality.

- For morality to work there must be a common source for these values.
Morality

- God has written his Law on our hearts

- So each of us has an intuitive feeling when we have done something wrong

- Catholic morality is based on more than feelings but on Knowledge of right and wrong.
Catholic Morality

- This is a knowledge of the moral obligation to goodness: justice, charity, virtue and holiness
- A knowledge of the binding authority over my life
- A knowledge of moral facts: which things are right and which are wrong
Christian Morality

- Christian morality, unlike general morality, is based on the person of Jesus, who He was and who He is.

- Christian morality finds its origin in the Old Testament concept of covenant.
In the covenantal relationship God reaches out to us with a steadfast love.

We are required by this covenant to respond to God’s offer of love by living with God as the one goal and purpose of our life.
Christian Moral Life

- Our moral decisions should be motivated by our response to God’s love.

- We should respond with gratitude, faithfulness, and love.

- These are the primary motivations for a Christian moral life.
Ten Commandments

In the context of the covenantal relationship we can better understand the relationship of the Ten Commandments to the moral life.

These are not restrictive norms but rather norms that enable life in community.

The Ten Commandments state what is required of us with respect to the love of God and love of neighbor.
1st Commandment

“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them.”

“You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.”
2nd Commandment

“*You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.*”

The second commandment prescribes respect for the Lord's name.

The Name of the Lord Is Holy
“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.”

The seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the LORD."
4th Commandment

“Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you.”

The fourth commandment opens the second table of the Decalogue. It shows us the order of charity. God has willed that, after him, we should honor our parents to whom we owe life and who have handed on to us the knowledge of God.
5th Commandment

“You shall not kill.”

Human life is sacred because from its beginning it involves the creative action of God and it remains for ever in a special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole end.

God alone is the Lord of life from its beginning until its end: no one can under any circumstance claim for himself the right directly to destroy an “innocent human being”
6th Commandment

“You shall not commit adultery”
7th Commandment

“You shall not steal”

The seventh commandment forbids unjustly taking or keeping the goods of one's neighbor and wronging him in any way with respect to his goods.
8th Commandment

“You shall not bear false witness against thy neighbor”

The eighth commandment forbids misrepresenting the truth in our relations with others.
9th Commandment

“You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant, or his maidservant, or his ox, or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor's.”

St. John distinguishes three kinds of covetousness: lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride of life.

In the Catholic catechetical tradition, the ninth commandment forbids carnal covetousness; the tenth forbids coveting another's goods.
10th Commandment

“You shall not covet . . . anything that is your neighbor's. . . . You shall not desire your neighbor's house, his field, or his manservant, or his maidservant, or his ox, or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor's.”

The tenth commandment unfolds and completes the ninth, which is concerned with concupiscence of the flesh. It forbids coveting the goods of another, as the root of theft, robbery, and fraud.
Ten Commandments (Decalogue)

- From the beginning, God had implanted in the heart of man the precepts of the natural law. Due to the state of sin the understanding of this law became obscured.

- Through His love for His chosen people he provided a further explanation of this law...the Decalogue.
The Great Commandment (Mt 22:37-38) is both a summary and fulfillment of the Ten Commandments.

When asked "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments."
The Great Commandment emphasizes the love of God and neighbor and their inseparability. The Great Commandment is a moral imperative and is the foundation of Catholic social teaching.
The Sermon on the Mount and specifically “the Beatitudes” is considered the “charter document of Christian morality”

The Beatitudes are at the heart of Jesus' preaching. They take up the promises made to the chosen people since Abraham and fulfill these promises by ordering them no longer merely to the possession of a territory, but to the Kingdom of Heaven.
The Beatitudes

- Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.
- Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.
- Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.
- Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.
- Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God.
- Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
- Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you (falsely) because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven. Thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you.
The Beatitudes

The Beatitudes are an example of Jesus’ radical sayings where he turns the existing social and religious order upside down.

In the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus asks us to look beyond the “letter of the law” and focus more so on the “spirit of the law.”

The Beatitudes reveal the goal of human existence, the ultimate end of human acts: God calls us to his own beatitude.
The Beatitudes confront us with decisive moral choices.

They invite us to purify our hearts of bad instincts and to seek the love of God above all else.

They teach us that true happiness is not found in riches or well-being, in human fame or power, or in any human achievement— but in God alone, the source of every good and of all love.
Christian Morality

The Ten Commandments, the Great Commandment, the Sermon on the Mount, and apostolic teachings describe for us the paths that lead to the Kingdom of Heaven and to the moral or good life.

“Christian morality is not...a matter of principles, laws, or strategies for resolving a moral dilemma. Rather, it is first a matter of attending to the life of Jesus so as to exhibit in one's own life the virtues which Jesus had and to allow what Jesus has revealed about God and human life to inform our moral discernment”. Father Richard Gula, “Reason Informed by Faith”
Moral Character

- Our commitment to Jesus should radically influence our moral character and our moral decision-making.

- This emphasis on moral character and the person represents a shift in Catholic morality that had endured since the Council of Trent in the 16th century. We are no longer simply looking at the laws, obligations and duties but also the moral character of the person and the moral decision making process.

- Not just “What ought I to do?” but also “What ought I to be?”
Vatican II emphasized the dignity of man on the basis of his creation in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26-27)

By his reason, man recognizes the voice of God which urges him "to do what is good and avoid what is evil."

By free will, he is capable of directing himself toward his true good.
As we look at the dignity of man we must also focus on the dignity of conscience which is at the core of Catholic morality.

The Prophet Jeremiah promised a new covenant, a law that will be written upon our hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-33)

Conscience incorporates this “Natural law” into man’s nature as a volitional and rational being.
Moral Conscience

Moral conscience, present at the heart of the person, urges him to do good and to avoid evil. When he listens to his conscience, the prudent man can hear God speaking.

Conscience is a judgment of reason whereby the human person recognizes the moral quality of an act that he is going to perform, is in the process of performing, or has already completed.
Conscience must be informed and moral judgment enlightened.

The education of conscience is indispensable for human beings who are subjected to negative influences and tempted by sin to prefer their own judgment … and to reject the authoritative teachings of the Church.

The education of the conscience is a lifelong task.
Formation of Conscience

In the formation of conscience we are assisted and aided by:

- the gifts of the Holy Spirit
- the witness or advice of others
- Scripture
- Theologians
- the examination of conscience/act of reconciliation
- the authoritative teachings of the Church.
Conscience

- When formed responsibly, one must **follow the dictate of conscience**, even if in error, for conscience comprises a part of our very dignity.

- **Vatican II**: *Our conscience, once properly informed, is inviolable and we are obligated to obey our conscience or be judged accordingly.*

- Conscience is at the very core of Christian morality.
Moral Decision Making

- Catholic morality focuses on character (the person) and action.

- Freedom makes man a moral subject. Thus we are capable of choosing either good or evil.
Moral Decision Making

We judge the morality of an act by asking:

- Is the action good or evil in itself?
- What is our intention or end in choosing it?
- What are the circumstances or consequences of this action?
The ‘action’ morally specifies the act as good or evil.

In his encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, Pope John Paul II states, "The morality of the human act depends primarily and fundamentally on the 'object' rationally chosen by the deliberate will"
Moral Decision Making

- The ‘end or intention’ indicates the purpose pursued in the action. One and the same action can also be inspired by several intentions, such as performing a service in order to obtain a favor or to boast about it versus love of God.

- A good intention does not make behavior that is intrinsically disordered, such as lying and stealing, good or just. *The end does not justify the means.* On the other hand, an added bad intention (such as pride) makes an act evil that, in and of itself, can be good (such as almsgiving).
Moral Decision Making

The *circumstances* contribute to increasing or diminishing the moral goodness or evil of human acts. They can also increase or decrease the agent's responsibility/culpability (such as acting out of a fear of death).

Circumstances of themselves cannot change the moral quality of acts themselves; they can make neither good nor right an action that is in itself evil.
There are some concrete acts—such as fornication, blasphemy and perjury, murder and adultery—that it is always wrong to choose, because choosing them entails a disorder of the will, that is, a moral evil. These acts are referred to as intrinsically evil.
Moral Decision Making

- It is an error to judge the morality of human acts by considering only the intention that inspires them or the circumstances which supply their context.

- One may not do evil so that good may result from it.
The Christian moral life is rooted in the person and life of Jesus.

Moral decision-making relies on the dignity of conscience informed by the numerous wisdom sources we have discussed.

It is the conscience, the sacred core and sanctuary, that we are alone with God.
Summary

- It is here (the conscience) that we respond to the universal law written on our hearts to do good and avoid evil.

- We are obligated to follow our conscience *when properly informed* or be judged accordingly.

- We can best pursue the “Christian moral life” through prayer, living a virtuous life, discipleship, and the active pursuit of social justice.
The Morality of the Passions

Passions are emotions or feelings that incline us to act or not to act in regard to something felt or imagined to be good or evil.

There are many passions. The principal passions are love and hatred, desire and fear, joy, sadness, and anger.

The most fundamental passion is love, aroused by the attraction of the good.

"To love is to will the good of another." (St. Thomas Aquinas)
Passions

In themselves passions are neither good nor evil.

Passions are morally good when they contribute to a good action, evil in the opposite case.

Moral perfection consists in man's being moved to the good not by his will alone, but also by his passions.

This is accomplished through the virtuous life.
The goal of a virtuous life is to become like God.

Human virtues are firm attitudes, stable dispositions, and habitual perfections of intellect and will that govern our actions, order our passions, and guide our conduct.

These moral virtues are acquired by human effort. They are the fruit and seed of morally good acts.
Cardinal (Human Moral) Virtues

- **Prudence** is the virtue that disposes practical reason to discern our true good in every circumstance and to choose the right means of achieving it; it is prudence that immediately guides the judgment of conscience.

- **Justice** is the moral virtue that consists in the constant and firm will to give to God and neighbor their due.

- **Fortitude** is the moral virtue that ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good. It strengthens the resolve to resist temptations and to overcome obstacles in the moral life.

- **Temperance** is the moral virtue that moderates the attraction of pleasures and provides balance in the use of created goods. It ensures the will's mastery over instincts and keeps desires within the limits of what is honorable.
The human virtues are rooted in the **theological virtues**, which relate directly to God. They dispose Christians to live in a relationship with the Holy Trinity which is their **origin, motive, and object**.

The theological virtues are the **foundation of Christian moral activity**; they animate it and give it its special character.

There are three theological virtues: faith, hope, and charity.
Theological Virtues

- **Faith** is the theological virtue by which we believe in God and believe all that He has said and revealed to us, and that Holy Church proposes for our belief.

- **Hope** is the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit.

- **Charity** is the theological virtue by which we love God above all things for his own sake, and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God.
The moral life of Christians is sustained by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. These make man more receptive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

There are seven gifts of the Holy Spirit:
Gifts of the Holy Spirit

WISDOM  KNOWLEDGE
UNDERSTANDING  PIETY
COUNSEL  FEAR OF THE LORD
FORTITUDE

They complete and perfect the virtues