

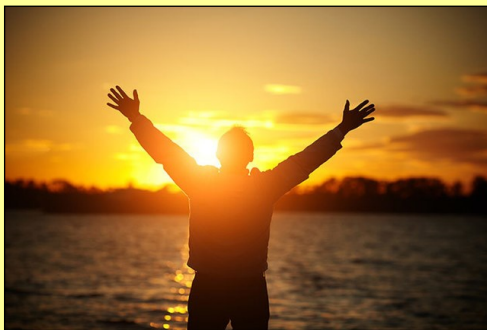


CATHOLIC MORAL TEACHING

THE IMAGE AND LIKENESS OF GOD

All human beings are created in the image and likeness of God and have, from conception to natural death, inherit dignity as a child of God. This dignity isn't something that is earned but gifted to us from the Lord. We have an immortal soul, free will, intelligence, and the ability to reason.

Every human is affected by original sin, inherited from our first parents. Baptism cleanses us of this sin, but not of its effects. The effects of original sin, called concupiscence, are responsible for our inclination to sin. Through the grace of God we are able to fight against these effects in our lives.



THE RESPONSIBLE PRACTICE OF FREEDOM

God gave us free will. He will not force us to love Him, or to choose eternal life with Him. The choice is left up to us. Freedom, seen in this context, does not mean that we are free to do whatever we please without consequences. True freedom is that we are free to choose the good, to choose against sin, to choose God and live in a way that is pleasing to Him.



THE UNDERSTANDING OF MORAL ACTS

Another important foundation of Christian morality is the understanding of moral acts. Every moral act consists of three elements: the objective act (what we do), the subjective goal or intention (why we do the act), and the concrete situation or circumstances in which we perform the act (where, when, how, with whom, the consequences, etc.). These are the elements we look at when deciding the morality of an act. A *morally good* act requires the goodness of the object, of the end, and of the

circumstances together. An evil end corrupts the action, even if the object is good in itself (such as praying and fasting "in order to be seen by men").



REALITY OF SIN AND TRUST IN GOD'S MERCY

We cannot speak about life in Christ or the moral life without acknowledging the reality of sin, our own sinfulness, and our need for God's mercy. When the existence of sin is denied it can result in spiritual and psychological damage because it is ultimately

a denial of the truth about ourselves. Admitting the reality of sin helps us to be truthful and opens us to the healing that comes from Christ's redemptive act.

FORMATION OF CONSCIENCE

Conscience represents both the more general ability we have as human beings to know what is good and right and the concrete judgments we make in particular situations concerning what we should do or about what we have already done. Moral choices confront us with the decision to follow or depart from reason and the Divine Law. A good conscience makes judgments that conform to reason and the good that is willed by the Wisdom of God. A good conscience requires lifelong formation. The Word of God is the principal tool in the formation of conscience when it is assimilated by study, prayer, and practice. The prudent advice and good example of others support and enlighten our conscience. The authoritative teaching of the Church is an essential element in our conscience formation. Finally, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, combined with regular examination of our conscience, will help us develop a morally sensitive conscience.

VIRTUES

The Christian moral life is one that seeks to cultivate and practice virtue. "A virtue is a 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" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (CCC) no. 1803). An effective moral life demands the practice of both human and theological virtues. Human virtues form us with habits that support good moral behavior, control passions, and avoid sin. Virtues guide our conduct according to the dictates of faith and reason, leading us toward true freedom based on self-control and toward joy in living a good moral life. There are a number of ways in which we acquire virtues. They are acquired by frequent repetition of virtuous acts that establish a pattern of virtuous behavior. There is a reciprocal relationship between virtue and acts because virtue, as an internal reality, inclines 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.

Each of the Ten Commandments forbid certain sins, but each also points to virtues that will help us avoid such sins. Virtues such as generosity, poverty of spirit, gentleness, purity of heart, temperance, and fortitude assist us in overcoming and avoiding what are called the seven deadly or Capital Sins—pride, avarice or greed, envy, anger, lust, gluttony, and sloth or laziness—which are those sins that engender other sins and vices.



THE CONNECTION BETWEEN LOVE, RULES, AND GRACE

Our modern culture tends to look at rules as confining and restricting, but this is not how God's law was intended or how it should be viewed. God puts certain rules in place because He loves us, and He wants us to be safe. When you spend time reflecting on the Ten Commandments, for instance, you can see that their intent is to keep us from harming God and one another. They spring from God's deep love for us, and His desire for us to spend eternity with Him. He gives us guidelines

to help us live safe and holy lives, and then He gives us grace to help us follow them.

THE PRECEPTS OF THE CHURCH

1.) **Attendance at Mass on Sundays (or Saturday evening) and Holy Days of Obligation:**

January 1, the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God
Thursday of the Sixth Week of Easter, the Solemnity of the Ascension
August 15, the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary
November 1, the Solemnity of All Saints
December 8, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception
December 25, the Solemnity of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ

2.) **Confession of serious sin at least once a year**

3.) **Reception of Holy Communion at least once a year during the Easter season**

4.) **Observance of the days of fast and abstinence**

Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are days of both fasting and abstinence from meat

Every Friday in Lent is a day of abstinence from meat

Every Friday of the year is a day of penance in some form, such as giving up something or saying extra prayers

5.) **Providing for the needs of the Church – this can take many forms, including time, talent, treasure, and prayer.**

