

25. Morality & The Social Teaching of the Church

Made in God's image, His law is written on our hearts. It illuminates our reason to know good and evil. Living a moral life compels us to love our neighbour in justice and charity.

Key terms:

- Morality:** Christian morality encompasses the standards of right conduct derived from Christian teachings, emphasizing love, compassion, and ethical behaviour as taught by Jesus Christ. Rooted in the example of Christ, Christian morality seeks to guide believers' actions, emphasizing a personal relationship with God and the importance of following His teachings to reflect divine goodness in their lives.
- Conscience:** 'is a judgement of reason by which the human person recognises the moral quality of a concrete act'.
- Virtue:** 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.
- Intellect:** Faculty of thought; its function includes attention, conception, judgement, reasoning, reflection, and self-consciousness. It is created to seek truth and goodness.
- Law:** Rules of behaviour and intention made by God or human authority intended to promote individual virtue and the good of society.
- Moral law:** The law made by God for our own happiness and to keep us from turning away from his love.
- Natural law:** The moral law written on every human heart that can be known by reason alone.
- Will:** The faculty of choice; the rational appetite that stands in an authoritative relation to lower appetites, over which it exercises a preferential control; it is created to do good.
- Object:** Something to which the will directs itself; that is, something deliberately chosen to be thought, said, done, or not done.
- Authority:** The ability of persons or institutions to give orders and expect obedience.
- Common good:** The sum of social conditions that allow each person to be fulfilled.
- Equality:** The dignity of all human beings from which their human rights flow, unaffected by variations in inborn or acquired differences, capabilities, or wealth.
- Family:** 1) The basic unity of society, composed of a man and a woman married to each other and their children;
2) the universal community of all human beings.
- Solidarity:** The sharing of spiritual and material goods based on justice and Christian charity.
- Voluntary Ignorance:** results from the neglect to take reasonable steps to acquire important knowledge.
- Involuntary Ignorance:** When the agent does not understand the particular circumstances involved and expresses pain and sorrow afterwards.

NATURAL LAW AND GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION THROUGH JESUS (Jn. 14:6)

- Every human person is a being of immeasurable dignity because each is created in the image and likeness of God, with a spiritual and immortal soul (or spirit), intelligence and free will.
- God wants everyone to find eternal beatitude (happiness) and has placed this desire deep within every heart.
- All evildoing has consequences for the soul and for society; all evil offends God, harms ourselves, and harms others.
- Due to original sin, our nature and consciences have become prone to uncertainty and error. (Rom 3:9-18)
- For certainty, we need God's revelation of his law, so that we may form our consciences to a reliable standard.
- The Ten Commandments are a written expression of the natural law and reinforce it.
- In his preaching, Christ perfected the law (Mt. 5:16-20); in his life on earth, he is our model. (Eph. 5:1-2)
- God's grace, poured out upon humanity through the cross, is needed to be able to keep the law. (Rom 6:1-14)
- Jesus founded the Church's magisterium; the Holy Spirit guides and animates her Tradition; her authority extends to proclaiming and teaching the natural law in areas not covered by the Ten Commandments.
- Through the Holy Spirit, we can form our conscience to the Church's teaching; it is the reliable standard given by God to enlighten our path to him. (1Tim 3:15)

NATURAL LAW IS GOD'S LAW, STAMPED ON OUR NATURE BY A LOVING FATHER (Rom 2:14-15)

- Morality presupposes reason; only human beings can engage in moral behaviour.
- Morality arises from a desire for God and expresses the dignity of the human person.
- Because the natural law is written into our very nature, it is universal and unchanging.
- All, even those who are without understanding (infants, young children, those whose intellectual capacity is impaired) have the same rights under natural law.
- All must obey natural law, unless they cannot reason.
- Natural law is the basis for civil law but is superior to civil law.
- Conscience is a practical moral judgement of our intellect that warns us when we are doing wrong.

WHAT GOES INTO MAKING A MORAL ACT (Lk.6:45)

- 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.).
- The goodness or badness of the object – that towards which the will of a person primarily tends and which gives the act its morality.
- The intention in doing the act – the goal or end intended
 - A good end does not justify a bad means; that is, a good intention cannot make a bad act good
 - A bad intention can make a good act bad.

- The circumstances that affect the moral act – who did it, by what aids or instruments he did it, what he did, where he did it, why he did it, when he did it.
- Impediments to the moral act:
 - Coercion can make a bad act less evil
 - Voluntary ignorance cannot lessen the evil of an act, for the natural law is inborn; involuntary ignorance does lessen culpability
 - Feelings and passions, morally neutral, can affect the goodness or badness of an act.

LIVING OUT THE CHURCH'S SOCIAL TEACHING

- Society is ordered to the good of the person; the person is not the instrument of society.
- Our rights relate to both the individual and the common good.
- There is dignity in human labour, and labourers deserve a just wage. (Deut. 24:14)
- There is a need to end sinful inequality in the distribution of goods.
- We owe special care to the poor and others in need; the value and worth of persons is not found in their usefulness but in their intrinsic dignity.
- Being Jesus to others – developing our gifts of mind, heart, and body and using them for the good of others.
- Performing the corporal and spiritual works of mercy (Mt. 25:31-46)
- Living a life of justice, generosity, and love that includes generous giving to the poor.
- Praying for the needs of others and for the coming of the Kingdom. (Jn. 15:16)

EXPLORE!

- Explore with the candidates how they can form their conscience to help them discern what is right and what is wrong?
- Explore with the candidates what “being moral” means?
- What are the consequences of a lack of morality in a community?
- Can a moral and ethical society exist without belief in a higher power or divine authority, or is religion necessary for guiding human behaviour?
- Are we born with a sense of morality or do we learn it? Does morality have human or divine origins?

Morality & The Social Teaching of the Church — Suggested Questions for Discussion:

1. What is the role of prayer in making moral decisions?
2. Is it possible to make moral judgements without religion?
3. What is the difference between moral relativism and moral absolutism?
4. What is the relationship between reason and morality?
5. What is social justice and how should Christians think about it?
6. Why not just go with your "gut feeling" when confronted with a situation that presents a moral dilemma? Why not use feelings as a guide for conduct?

PRAYER

Psalm 16 or 37

or

Gospel Reflection:	Year A	Mt. 26:14-27:66
	Year B	Mk. 14:1-15:47
	Year C	Lk. 22:14-23:56

The following format will be used for all Gospel reflections:

- Read the text aloud.
- Pause for a minute's silence.
- Read the text aloud again.
- Ask everyone to pick a word or a phrase that struck them. They just say the word or phrase without comment or discussion.
- Read the text again.
- Ask those present to comment on their word or phrase. What struck them about it? Why/how is it speaking to them?
- Continue with the discussion.

The following questions may be helpful:

What does this mean to me?

How does it make me feel?

Did I find the text disturbing/hopeful/confusing?

What images of God emerge for me?

What do I think that God is saying in this text?

What impact does this have on my life?

Scripture and Catechism Resources

Morality

Scripture

- Prov. 11:3 The integrity of the upright is a guide for others.
- Ex. 20:1-17 God entrusts to Moses the Law in the form of Ten Commandments.
- Ez. 20:23-26 God sets the parameters within which He is honoured.
- Acts 5:29 Obey God, not man.
- Mt. 5:27-28 You shall not commit adultery.
- Mt. 6:24 Man cannot serve two masters: God and money.
- Mt. 7:12 Do to others what you would have them do to you and this sums up the Law and the Prophets.
- Mk. 7:2-23 What comes from within a person's heart is that defiles a person.
- Rom 6:15-19 Humanity has been set free from sin to become 'slaves' to righteousness.
- Rom 8:7 When we live by righteousness, we submit to God's law.
- Rom 13:8-10 The one who loves another has fulfilled the Law.
- 1Cor 15:33 Bad company ruins good morals.
- 1 Cor 6:9-11 Those sanctified and justified in the name of Jesus Christ will inherit the Kingdom of God.
- 1Tim 6:10 Love of money is the root of all kinds of evil.
- 2Tim 3:16 Through Scripture, God teaches, reproves, corrects and trains for righteousness.
- Gal. 5:19-21 Those who indulge in the works of the flesh will not inherit the kingdom of God.
- 1 Pet 1:16 Be holy, as God is holy.
- Tit 2:1 As you teach, do so with what accords with sound doctrine.
- Rev. 21:8 The consequences for those who live an immoral life.
- 1 Jn. 2:15-17 Do not love the world or things in the world, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

Catechism

- 1749-1754 What determines the morality of human acts.
- 1755-1759 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.
- 1762-1770 Passions become good or bad only when the intellect and will become involved.
- 1776-1794 Conscience: what it is, how it judges, is formed, and chooses; ways it can err.
- 1860 No one is ignorant of natural law.
- 1949-1965 Natural law as moral law.
- 2036 The Church's authority in faith and morals extends to interpreting and teaching the natural law because observing the natural law is essential for our salvation.
- 2070-2072 Natural law is revealed in the Ten Commandments.
- 2242 Disobedience to human laws is justified when they violate natural law.

The Social Teachings of the Church

Scripture

Gen. 1:26-31	We are made in God's image and likeness, and the earth is entrusted to us for our benefit and its protection.
Ex. 3:7-9	God has heard the cry of the enslaved and oppressed Israelites.
Ex. 22:22	God commands special care of widows and orphans.
Lev. 24:22	There should be one law for citizen and immigrant alike.
Lev. 25:1-37	God's commandments regarding the ownership and care of property.
Deut. 24:14	The wage-earner, whether citizen or immigrant, is not to be underpaid.
Mt. 5:42	Be generous to beggars and those who need loans.
Mt. 6:24	If we are mastered by love of money, God cannot be our master.
Mt. 25:14-30	We must make best use of our gifts from God as his stewards.
Mt. 25:31-46	We will be judged according to how we have loved others.
Lk. 19:8	Conversion to Christ includes care for the poor.
Rom. 13:1-7	Human authorities have their power from God and must be respected and obeyed.
2 Thess 3:6-12	We are not entitled to be idle; those who do not work are not entitled to support.
1 Tim 6:6-10	Be content with few material possessions; evil comes from a desire to be rich.
Jas. 2:1-17	Do not dishonour the poor but love all others; a living faith is shown in good works.
Jas. 5:1-6	Wealth gains us nothing; and God has heard the cries of those whose unjust wages supplied our wealth.
1 Jn. 4:20-21	Love of God is inseparable from love of neighbour.

Catechism

909	Role of the laity in social justice.
1877-1889	The human community, definition and purpose of society, charity requires justice.
1897-1917	Authority, the common good, obligations in promoting the common good.
1928-1948	Social justice: human dignity and solidarity.
2207-2213	Social justice with respect to the family.
2401-2418	The Seventh Commandment commands respect for private property and creation.
2419-2449	The social doctrine of the Church.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Is it ever okay to lie? If so, when and why?
2. Do you believe that everyone should have equal rights? Why or why not?
3. If you discovered that a popular product you use daily was produced unethically (e.g., using child labour or harming the environment), would you continue to use it? Why or why not?
4. Is it ethical to use animals for testing products or scientific research?
5. Should we always help someone in need, even if it puts ourselves at risk?
6. Is it ethical to download or share copyrighted content (music, movies, etc.) without permission?
7. Should people have the right to choose their own medical treatments, even if it could be dangerous to their health?
8. Should governments have the right to monitor and regulate the internet?
9. Is it acceptable to use social media to publicly shame someone for their behaviour?
10. Should wealthy individuals and corporations be required to donate a portion of their wealth to help those in need?
11. Is capital punishment (the death penalty) morally justifiable in some cases? Why or why not?
12. If you could prevent a serious crime from happening by breaking the law yourself, would you do it? Why or why not?