

RCIA
Christian Morality – Part I
Session 19

“Freedom makes man a moral subject. When he acts deliberately, man is so to speak the father of his acts. Human acts, that is, acts that are freely chosen in consequence of a judgment of conscience, can be morally evaluated. They are either good or evil.”

(#1749 Catechism of the Catholic Church)



MORALITY – PART I

Moral Virtues:

- Prudence:** guides our conscience to apply moral principles correctly in our daily living.
- Justice:** disposes our hearts and minds to respect the rights of others and promote harmony and equity in human relationships.
- Fortitude:** strengthens us in difficult times and keeps us on the correct path. It helps us to overcome fear and accept the trials and sufferings that come our way.
- Temperance:** is the mastery we gain over our feelings and appetites, enabling us to maintain a proper balance even in the midst of desires that are inherently insatiable.

Theological Virtues:

- Faith:** the 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, because He God is truth itself.
- Hope:** 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:** by which we love God above all things for His own sake, and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God.

Moral Considerations for Catholics

- Beatitudes:** a list of blessings included in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's Gospel, with variations in Luke's Gospel.
- Corporal Works of Mercy:** Seven charitable works encouraged by the Church.
- Fruits of the Spirit:** Twelve virtues related to the work of the Holy Spirit in people.
- Gifts of the Spirit:** Seven virtues related to the work of the Holy Spirit in people.
- Sermon on the Mount:** Chapters 5-7 of Matthew's Gospel, which includes many of Jesus' teachings.
- Spiritual Works of Mercy:** Seven spiritual charitable works encouraged by the Church.

Moral training and education must be based on the values of Jesus and found in the Scriptures. The *Sermon on the Mount* and the *Beatitudes*, as found in Matthew chapters 5-7, and Luke Chapter 6, challenge us to a radical conversion and way of life according to the mind of Christ. This spirit is spelled out further in the *Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy*.

The ***Corporal Works of Mercy*** are:

to feed the hungry,
to give drink to the thirsty,
to clothe the naked,
to visit the imprisoned,
to shelter the homeless,
to visit the sick, and
to bury the dead.

The ***Spiritual Works of Mercy*** are:

To admonish the sinner,
To instruct the ignorant,
To counsel the doubtful,
To comfort the sorrowful,
To bear wrongs patiently,
To forgive injuries and hurts, and
To pray for the living and the dead.

If we examine these and live them, we will be adhering to most of the requirements for Christian living in our actions.

Living the moral life also includes heeding the work of the Spirit within us, who graces us with spiritual strength. Therefore, in our consideration of morality, we cannot overlook the virtues and habits one develops by responding to the Spirit. In theological language, we have called these qualities the Fruits and Gifts of the Spirit. These lie at the base of our morality and show forth in our actions. They are open to all.

The ***Gifts of the Spirit***, as mentioned in Isaiah 11:2-3, are:

Wisdom,
Understanding,
Counsel,
Fortitude,
Knowledge,
Piety, and
Fear of the Lord.

St Paul speaks of the ***Fruits of the Spirit*** in Galatians 5:22-23. He upholds the goodness of virtue as opposed to a life of sin. The twelve Fruits of the Spirit include:

Charity,	Joy,
Peace,	Patience,
Kindness,	Goodness,
Long suffering,	Mildness,
Faith,	Modesty,
Contenance, and	Charity.

These are especially mentioned because it would be a beneficial practice, when one examines one's conscience, to consider how one includes the exercise of positive good habits instead of focusing solely on the negative vices.

Morality as Creative Goodness

To live a moral life is not just to avoid sin or evil. We ought not live by an avoidance, negative morality, but by a positive, dynamic, creative morality. The moral person asks the question, "What *can* I do?" rather than "what *must* I do?"

Ordinary, daily actions and decisions do not revolve around the choice between vice and virtue. Most of our routine deeds involve choices between good or the better. They are not mainly decisions of right or wrong, allowed or forbidden.

There is more to life than fulfilling obligations. A mother who does the minimum of feeding and clothing her child and does nothing more, can hardly be considered living up to her moral responsibilities. The amount of our creative goodness outweighs the good we must do. Duty is the least we can do in a situation.

Each one can create a moral climate by making the world a better place and by doing one's best in one's situation. To diffuse virtue and goodness as much as possible in one's environment and world is living the moral life intensely and fully. We can, therefore, create our own level of goodness. We can opt for the barest minimum or do our best in every situation. It is putting one's heart into one's work; it is doing the most loving thing in every instance. Think what a wonderful world it would be if each person would try to do the most loving actions at all times. Imagine if all would diffuse as much as possible of Christ's loving presence. The way to show forth the presence of God within the world is with a morality built on love and Christ's teachings.

God left for people a task for moral creativity as creation, "to cultivate and care for" the earth (Genesis 2:15). God referred not only to ecology, but to the fact that humanity is called to make the world a fully human place, with moral goodness diffused through the moral choices of people.

Catholics need to form an authentic conscience which embraces more than their won actions. One needs to take a stand on issues that affect the well-being of others. Therefore, a moral person gets involved in social justice interests. This requires fortitude and integrity. One who is moral is completely honest in all business dealing, gives everyone their due, and is governed by the Law of Love.

When one is caught in the web of conflict, torn between alternatives, and not knowing which course to pursue, one must weigh the issue responsibly, pray, and decide sincerely what is the most moral path to follow. A rightly formed conscience can rest peacefully with decisions.

All one's actions need to be governed by the great commandment: "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and all your strength*" (Mark 12:30, Deuteronomy 6:5). Likewise, "*Love your neighbor as yourself.*" On these precepts rests the whole moral law. Love motivates one toward the good.

Practical, everyday situations which demand a moral decision require that a person be able to establish priorities. It would hardly be considered morally

plausible for one to volunteer many hours at a soup kitchen and neglect one's family. Extra charity may give one greater satisfaction, but devotion to one's duty and prime obligation needs to take precedence.

To be baptized and to live the Catholic faith in the spirit of Vatican II is to live the challenge of Christ in a morally responsible way. It is to live a moral life through love, not coercion. The mission of the Church is to be a sign, to transform the world, and to evoke its redeeming qualities.

The most famous and best known moral teaching of many western religions center in some way around the ***Ten Commandments***. God delivered to Moses these Commandments in the desert of Mount Sinai. As Moses received them the number was not so clearly given. However, down through the years, the Church has numbered these Commandments as ten and lined them up as follows:

1. I, the Lord, am your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of slavery. You shall not have other gods besides me.
2. You shall not take the name of the Lord, your God, in vain.
3. Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day.
4. Honor your father and your mother.
5. You shall not kill.
6. You shall not commit adultery.
7. You shall not steal.
8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor
9. You shall not covet your neighbor's house
10. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife. ... Exodus 20:2-3, 7-8, 12-17)

The Book of Exodus goes on to explain these laws and others more at length. The Ten Commandments became the central law of the people of Israel, and Jesus emphasized their importance by quoting some of them to the people of His own day. In the Gospel of Matthew, when a rich man asked Jesus what he must do to possess eternal life, Jesus tells him, "Keep the commandments if you want to enter life." "What commandments?" he asked. Jesus answered. "Do not commit murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal; do not accuse anyone falsely, respect your father and your mother; and (Jesus adds) love your neighbor as you love yourself." (Matthew 19:17-19). Jesus, however, invites the man to live beyond the commandments and to come to perfection. He tells him, "If you want to be perfect, go and sell all you have, and give the money to the poor, and you will have riches in heaven; then come and follow me" (Matthew 19:21). Although Jesus honored the commandments, he asked his followers to do even more than what was demanded by the commandments.

Key Themes of Jesus' Message

1. The Call to Love one another and ourselves.

Jesus said that our love for one another is a sign by which others will know that we are His disciples (Jn 13:34-35). Jesus said that we need to love others as we love ourselves and to remember that we are always loved by God.

Key Passages – Jn. 13:34-35; Mt. 22:34-40; Mk. 12:28-34; Lk. 10:25; Lk. 10:25-37.

2. The Call to Love even our enemies.

"Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ... If you love those who love you, Jesus said, "What credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them".

Key Passages – Lk. 6:27-36; Mt. 5:43-48

3. The call to forgive one another and always to seek reconciliation with one another.

Jesus said that we cannot ask forgiveness for our own sins unless we are also ready to forgive those who sin against us. Jesus said that we should not presume to offer sacrifice to God unless and until we have been reconciled with our brother or sister.

Key Passages – Mt. 5:23-24; Mt. 6:12-15; Lk. 15:11-32; Lk. 11:4; Lk. 17:4; Mt. 18:21-22.

4. The call to renounce revenge.

"If anyone strikes you on the cheek," Jesus said, "offer the other also."

Key Passages – Lk. 6:27-36; Mt. 5: 38-48.

5. The call to avoid judging and condemning others.

"Do not judge," Jesus said, "and you will not be judged: do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. ...First take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye."

Key Passages – Lk. 6:37-42; Mt. 7:1-6, Jn. 8:1-11

6. The call to avoid self-righteousness, presumption, and resentment toward others.

Jesus repudiated the proud Pharisee and the resentful elder brother in the parable of the prodigal son. He condemned those who try to shut the doors of the Kingdom of God so that others could not enter it and said the publicans and prostitutes would enter the Kingdom before their detractors would.

Key Passages – Lk. 15:25-30; Lk. 18: 10-17; Mt. 6:2-4; Mt. 21:31-32; Mt. 23:1-33

7. The call to befriend those whom society looks down upon.

Jesus made himself the friend of the outcasts and did not avoid their company.

Key Passages – Mt. 11:19; Mk. 2:16-17; Lk. 8:26-39; Lk. 14:12-14.

8. The call to serve one another, humbly and unselfishly.

Jesus gave us an example when he washed the feet of his disciples. "But when you give a banquet," Jesus said, "invite the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind. And you will be blessed because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

Key Passages – Jn. 13:4-17; Lk. 14:12-14; Lk. 22:27.

9. The call to serve the poor.

Jesus singled out the poor in the beatitudes, insisting that the reign of god will be theirs, as did Mary in her Magnificat: "He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty". Jesus' parable of Lazarus and the rich man is particularly compelling. Indeed, Pope John Paul II frequently cites it in summoning the church to the service of the poor and powerless.

Key Passages – Lk. 1:52-53; Lk. 6:20; Lk. 16:19-31; Mt. 25:31-46.

10. The corresponding call to beware of riches and the attachment to possessions.

Jesus said it would be easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter into the kingdom of god. He said that those who would be his disciples should be ready to sell all that they have and give to the poor.

Key Passages – Mt. 6:24; Mt. 19:16-30; Lk. 12:13-21; Kl. 16:19-31; Lk. 18:18-29; Mk. 10:17-31.

11. The call always to be just in our dealings with others.

Jesus attacked the scribes and Pharisees for straining at gnats and swallowing camels and for neglecting the weightier matters of the law, including justice first.

Key Passages

Mt. 23:23-24; Lk. 11:42; Mk. 12:38-40

12. The call to pray always and with complete trust in God.

Jesus said that we should pray in complete confidence to God. "Ask and you will receive. Search, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened to you."

Key Passages

Mt. 6:5-15; Mt. 7:7-11; Lk. 11:2-4, 9-13; Lk. 18:1-14.

Catholic Values Today

Respect for Human Dignity

Catholics are called to respect, love, and promote human life; and to defend the life, dignity, and rights of all people. Human dignity is the belief that all people have been endowed by God with dignity and deserve respect. It is the belief that everyone has something to offer. The Catholic faith begins with the recognition of the infinite worth of each and every human being – seeing the value and worth of every human being and honoring and respecting the uniqueness of each person.

Respect for the dignity of all people leads to defending their human rights – the right to the basics of life (e.g. food, clothing, shelter, education, work) and ensuring that everyone in society works to see that people's basic needs are met.

Respect for Creation and the Environment

Catholics are called to respect, care for, and defend all of creation. We are called to examine how we use and share the goods of the earth, and how we live in harmony with God's creation. Catholics are called to stewardship – the duty or responsibility to use the world's resources responsibly.

Love

Catholics are called to love one another and ourselves. Jesus said that our love for one another is sign by which others will know that we are his disciples (Jn. 13:34-35). Jesus said that we need to love others as we love ourselves and to remember that we are always loved by God.

Catholics are called to love even our enemies. "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ... If you love those who love you," Jesus said, "what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them" (Lk. 6: 27,32).

Justice

Catholics are called to actively work to right the wrongs, to balance the indignities, to fight for the good causes, and to bring human dignity into this well-intentioned but imperfect world. Justice means working for human equality and decency by not displaying ignorance or prejudice, by not judging others, by respecting differences, by opposing bias, bigotry, and discrimination. Justice means expanding our care and concern beyond our family and local community to the nations and world.

Care and Compassion

Catholics are called to hear another's cries of anguish, feel another's pain, and respond. Compassion is the experience of feeling the other's life as one's own. One of Jesus' most powerful stories focuses on the call to compassion; the Samaritan looks on the man in the ditch with compassion and responds in a way that no one expects (Lk. 10:25-37). Compassion moves us beyond just "feeling" the pain of another, it moves us to action.

Service

Catholics are called to serve one another, humbly and unselfishly. Jesus gave us an example when he washed the feet of his disciples (Jn. 13:4-17). Catholics are called to serve the poor and the powerless – feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless... (Mt. 25). Catholics are called to befriend those whom society looks down upon. Jesus made himself the friend of the outcasts (Mt. 11:19) and did not avoid their company (Mk. 2:16).

Forgiveness

Catholics are called to forgive one another and always to seek reconciliation with one another. Jesus said that we cannot ask forgiveness for our won sins unless we are also ready to forgive those who sin against us (Mt. 6:12). Catholics are called to renounce revenge. "If anyone strikes you on the cheek," Jesus said, "offer the other also" (Lk. 6:29).

Faithfulness

Catholics are called to develop relationships built on loyalty, trust, and love that provide intimacy, security, and happiness. Faithfulness in relationships involves respect and commitment between people. Catholics are called to reserve sexual intimacy to the committed relationship of marriage.

Honesty and Integrity

Catholics are called to be honest and genuine with other individuals, institutions, society, and self in every act, deed, and dealing. Honesty grows from an inner strength and confidence that is bred by exacting truthfulness, trustworthiness, and integrity.

BEATITUDE DOING

Beatitude values are reflected in the teachings of both testaments. The Sermon on the Mount summarizes what it means to live according to God's will.

Blessed are the poor in spirit.

Poverty is a sign that the reign of God is not yet complete. People who seek God's just reign strive to make an impact on poverty. In prayer, they seek spiritual direction for the actions they should take. The spiritually strong do not go away sad as the rich man of Matthew 19:21 did. They spiritually bind themselves in solidarity with the poor and use their resources to chip away at structures that cause poverty.

Blessed are those who mourn.

All followers participate with Jesus in messianic restoration of the world as foretold in Isaiah 61: 1-3. Jesus' mission is made manifest as He touches, heals, and brings those lost back to life. The primary ministry of believers is to bring God's care to those who cry out because they need comforting.

Blessed are the meek.

The prophet of Zechariah 9:9 foretold of a leader who would come in meekness. Jesus displayed meekness by submitting totally to God's will, and in doing so, he came to reign supreme over all the earth. Followers of Jesus are challenged to submit their own desires for owning things and power to the will of God. In so doing, they put the needs of the marginalized and the meek without dignified positions above their won interests.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Jesus is seen as God's servant who brings justice in Isaiah 42:1-4. This servant's voice is used in such a way that people are not turned off by it. The acts of a just servant are gentle and nonviolent. People who identify with Christ feel a hunger and thirst for what is right.

Blessed are the merciful.

Jesus exhorted followers to live with the compassion that comes from *Abba*. As recorded in Matthew 23, Jesus demonstrates the cycle of mercy. Forgiveness is the key to relationships. No community or spiritual life is healthy in which compassion is lacking.

Blessed are the pure in heart.

The psalmist in Psalm 24:3-6 links having a pure heart to seeing the face of God. Matthew shows Jesus linking internal attitude to external action as in chapter 6:21, whereby the treasures a person lays up shows where the heart is. The light

of God will come to those doing God's will. They will see clearly as they manifest God's love to others.

Blessed are the peacemakers.

Jesus' mission is that of peace as indicated by John 20:19-27. In resurrection appearances, Christ is the bearer of peace. Believers are to live in peace and bear that peace to others.

Blessed are those who suffer persecution for righteousness' sake.

The early Christian believers, especially those in Matthew's community, suffered persecution as followers of the new way. Jesus anticipates in Matthew 10:16-18 that persecution is an expected consequence for those who choose to live in a counter culture style. Such suffering is not, however, to be feared, because God will be with those doing what is right and the reward will be great.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,

for they shall be satisfied

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,

for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven

Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of

evil against you falsely on my account – Rejoice and be glad,

for your reward is great in heaven.