Come to the Table 2.0
Living a Deeply Fulfilled Life
Part 3
CT648W3

The Catholic Church proposes the following in terms of forming conscience:

♦ entering into serious study about the issue, the reason for the teaching, the history, what is behind the teaching, theological opinions for and against an issue,
♦ scouring the Scriptures for discernment,
♦ calling on the gifts of the Spirit to open our minds and hearts to the Church’s position on a given issue or teaching,
♦ honestly and openly trying to embrace the teaching,
♦ examining the motives and reasons for believing or acting,
♦ prayerfully asking God to embrace the teaching,
♦ seeking advice and counsel regarding the teaching.

Important: It should be extremely rare that a person would not be in accord with Church teaching on an issue if the previous process was fully and honestly entered into, and adhered to. It is enjoined upon every Catholic to embrace all the teachings of the Church.

Do!

♦ Can you relate what we do when we celebrate Eucharist, what we know about the Gospels, and what we have said about moral decisions, to some experience in your life?
♦ How does this teaching concretely have anything to do with your life?
♦ Are there any behaviors that we take for granted that might be called into question in light of our teaching on Christian morality (exceeding speed limits; cheating in the market place; avoiding taxes; telling so-called “white” lies; over-consuming food, liquor, or tobacco; and so forth)?
♦ What is your experience in forming your conscience? How does your conscience guide your moral decisions?

Think of a very difficult moral decision you had to make in your life.
What went into your decision-making process?
In what way, if any, did you prepare yourself to make this decision?
How does the Church assist you in reaching good moral decisions?

Prayer of Pope Clement XI
Lord, I believe in you: increase my faith. | I trust in you: strengthen my trust.
I love you: let me love you more and more. | I am sorry for my sins:
deeper my sorrow. | I worship you as my first beginning.
I long for you as my last end. | I praise you as my constant helper.
And I call on you as my loving protector. | I want to do what you ask of me:
in the way you ask, for as long as you ask, because you ask.
Let me love you Lord, as my God,
and see myself as I really am: a pilgrim in this world,
a Christian called to respect and love all whose lives I touch.

Living a Deeply Fulfilled Life
Part three: Conscience

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Come to the Table! Catholics & their friends having conversations about faith

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How do we grow as moral persons?
Participants read these faith statements aloud:
► We can grow in freedom by performing moral actions, by developing good habits.
► Sin dulls our ability to act morally. Thus, living a life of virtue is important if one wants to live a moral life.
► Such virtuous living strengthens our ability to live morally.

Conversation:
♦ What does it mean when we say that sin can weaken your capacity to live a moral life and living a moral life of virtue can increase our capacity to live morally?

Moral acts
► In order to understand Catholic morality, we must understand the essence of what constitutes a moral act. Every moral action has three parts:
  ♦ what we do: the act
  ♦ the intention: why we do the act
  ♦ the actual situation of the act: such as where and when it takes place, how the act is carried out, with whom it is carried out, and the consequences of the act.
► An act is moral if the act is by itself a good thing to do, a good action.
► Some things are, by nature, intrinsically bad, and thus, the act itself is not a moral act (such as murder, rape, or torture). The reason for doing such acts makes no difference. The act in and of itself is always immoral.
► An action is morally good if the action itself is a good action and if the person doing the act has a good intention.
► If the person carries out a good action, but has an evil intention or does it for an evil purpose, it is not a moral action because the person’s intention for doing it was evil in the first place.
► For example, consider a man who had an affair with another man’s wife. The man having the affair decides to apologize to the other man for having the affair. He makes such an apology in hopes that the husband will ultimately leave his wife, and the wife will decide to stay with the man who had the affair with her. The act itself (apologizing and asking for forgiveness) could be classified as a moral action, a good thing. However, it is an immoral action for two reasons. First, the man’s intention is to break up the marriage; his intention is evil. Second, the consequences would also result in an evil thing; it would break up a marriage and family. Thus, two out of the three elements that constitute a moral action are evil in and of themselves even though the action itself could be a good thing.
► The Church also teaches that we can never do something wrong or evil in order to bring about a good. The end does not justify the means. A person may not rob a bank to give money to the poor; the act itself is an evil act even if the intention was good.

Conversation:
♦ Let’s review what we just heard. If every moral action has three parts, what are those three parts?
♦ What are the implications of being aware of those three elements?
♦ Tell about your own experience or your observation of society around you in light of these three parts to every moral act.

Conscience is the highest order
► St. John Neumann reminded us that our conscience is the highest moral indicator. We are to follow our conscience above all else.
► Human beings have the right to act in freedom according to their conscience. They may not be forced to act contrary to their conscience, especially when it comes to religious issues (CCC, #1782).
► As human beings we are required to act according to our conscience. However, it is possible that our conscience is not properly formed and thus remains in ignorance and, in such cases, is subject to making false judgment about the morality of certain actions (CCC, #1790).
► This occurs when the person does little or nothing to inform his or her conscience and simply acts blindly.
► This same blindness occurs due to the habit of sin, which makes it difficult for us to see the culpability of our actions.
► Faith, prayer, and the word of God enlighten our conscience.

The group reads aloud article 1776 from the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

Conscience is not the same as “my opinion”
► We can be fooled into thinking that our opinion constitutes our upright, moral conscience. This is false.
► For us to simply say the following is not to act “in good conscience”:
  ♦ I am going to do this act regardless of what the Church teaches, or
  ♦ I am not going to do this act regardless of what the Church teaches, or
  ♦ I believe in this or that belief or teaching regardless of what the Church teaches, or
  ♦ I do not believe in this belief or teaching regardless of what the Church teaches.