



Understanding the Catholic Way of Life

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Ephesians 5: 1 - 20

So be imitators of God,
as beloved children, and live in love,
as Christ loved us and handed himself over for us as a sacrificial
offering to God for a fragrant aroma.

Immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be mentioned among
you, as is fitting among holy ones, no obscenity or silly or suggestive
talk, which is out of place, but instead, thanksgiving.

Be sure of this, that no immoral or impure or greedy person, that is, an
idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

Let no one deceive you with empty arguments, for because of these
things the wrath of God is coming upon the disobedient.

So do not be associated with them.

For you were once darkness,

but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light,
for light produces every kind of goodness and righteousness and truth.
Try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.

Take no part in the fruitless works of darkness; rather expose them,
for it is shameful even to mention the things done by them in secret;
but everything exposed by the light becomes visible,
for everything that becomes visible is light.

Therefore, it says: "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and
Christ will give you light."

Watch carefully then how you live, not as foolish persons but as wise,
making the most of the opportunity, because the days are evil.

Therefore, do not continue in ignorance, but try to understand what
is the will of the Lord. And do not get drunk on wine, in which lies
debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in
psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and playing to the Lord
in your hearts, giving thanks always and for everything in the name of
our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father.

Catholic Morality: Life in Christ

Catholic morality is about **life**: “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” (John 10:10)

Faith & baptism give us new life in Christ.

Christian, recognize your dignity and, now that you share in God’s own nature, do not return to your former base condition by sinning. Remember who is your head and of whose body you are a member. Never forget that you have been rescued from the power of darkness and brought into the light of the Kingdom of God. (Catechism, #1691)

Morality is a call to *recognize our dignity* as men and women who have received a free gift of new life in Christ. **We must live accordingly.**

The Law of Love

Our Lord Jesus himself clearly taught us the first principles of Catholic morality:

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.” (Matthew 22:37-40)

Love, or *charity*, is the great commandment of the Lord.

Love of God and love of neighbor are the source & summary of Catholic morality.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35)

Grace to the rescue!

The demand to love without limit *is* very demanding.

Christ’s disciples thought so, too!

They couldn’t believe that the demands of discipleship far exceeded human ability:

“When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astounded and said, ‘Then who can be saved?’” (Matthew 19:25)

Jesus’s response to them reveals the key:

“With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (Mt 19:26).

It is not **you** who will save yourself, it is God who saves you!

If you let him, God will give you the strength and ability to do more than you can believe is possible. And the more *you* give, the more help God will give you. We call this *grace*.

It is the Holy Spirit himself who gives us the gift of grace. He not only calls us to holiness, but he sanctifies us (makes us holy) and gives us the grace we need to respond to his own call.

Foundations of Catholic Morality

These are basic concepts in Catholic *moral theology*:

- Freedom
- Truth
- Natural Law
- Divine Law
- Moral Law
- Conscience

There's a lot to say about these, but I'll keep it short.

It boils down to this:

- God creates us in the state of **freedom**. We are at liberty to choose, based on reason and will, whether to act or not in a specific situation. We are responsible for our choices. With these choices, we choose our own ultimate destiny: that of eternal life with God, or that of death.
- We believe that **truth** is objective, and not relative to the subjective whims of culture or taste. It is valid at all times & everywhere. God is the ultimate source of all truth. People have an innate sense of basic truth.
- Using human reason, we can deduce the principles of the **Natural Law** (natural truth)... But because sin clouds our vision of the truth, God has chosen to reveal to us an explanation of the truth, called Divine Truth or Divine Revelation or **Divine Law**... first to the Israelites .. then through Jesus Christ.. to the world.
- Natural Law and Divine Law is the bases for our Catholic **Moral Law** (Catholic Morality / Moral Teachings of the Church)
- As Catholics, we must use our natural faculty called **conscience** to apply the general principles of the Catholic Moral Law to specific situations, judging specific actions to be right or wrong in accordance with Catholic Morality (Catholic Moral Law).



Understanding Catholic Morality - Catholic Social Teaching

The Church's social teaching is a rich treasure of wisdom about building a just society and living lives of holiness amidst the challenges of modern society. Modern Catholic social teaching has been articulated through a tradition of papal, conciliar, and episcopal documents. The depth and richness of this tradition can be understood best through a direct reading of these documents. In these brief reflections, we highlight several of the key themes that are at the heart of our Catholic social tradition.

Life and Dignity of the Human Person

The Catholic Church proclaims that human life is sacred and that the dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. This belief is the foundation of all the principles of our social teaching. In our society, human life is under direct attack from abortion and euthanasia. The value of human life is being threatened by cloning, embryonic stem cell research, and the use of the death penalty. The intentional targeting of civilians in war or terrorist attacks is always wrong. Catholic teaching also calls on us to work to avoid war. Nations must protect the right to life by finding increasingly effective ways to prevent conflicts and resolve them by peaceful means. We believe that every person is precious, that people are more important than things, and that the measure of every institution is whether it threatens or enhances the life and dignity of the human person.

Call to Family, Community, and Participation

The person is not only sacred but also social. How we organize our society -- in economics and politics, in law and policy -- directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community. Marriage and the family are the central social institutions that must be supported and strengthened, not undermined. We believe people have a right and a duty to participate in society, seeking together the common good and well-being of all, especially the poor and vulnerable.

Responsibility to protect and defend Human Rights

The Catholic tradition teaches that human dignity can be protected and a healthy community can be achieved only if human rights are protected and responsibilities are met. Therefore, every person has a fundamental right to life and a right to those things required for human decency. Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities--to one another, to our families, and to the larger society.

Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

A basic moral test is how our most vulnerable members are faring. In a society marred by deepening divisions between rich and poor, our tradition recalls the story of the Last Judgment (Mt 25:31-46) and instructs us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first.

The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers

The economy must serve people, not the other way around. Work is more than a way to make a living; it is a form of continuing participation in God's creation. If the dignity of work is to be protected, then the basic rights of workers must be respected--the right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, to the organization and joining of unions, to private property, and to economic initiative.

Solidarity

We are one human family whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. We are our brothers and sisters keepers, wherever they may be. Loving our neighbor has global dimensions in a shrinking world. At the core of the virtue of solidarity is the pursuit of justice and peace. Pope Paul VI taught that if you want peace, work for justice. The Gospel calls us to be peacemakers. Our love for all our sisters and brothers demands that we promote peace in a world surrounded by violence and conflict.

Care for God's Creation

We show our respect for the Creator by our stewardship of creation. Care for the earth is not just an Earth Day slogan, it is a requirement of our faith. We are called to protect people and the planet, living our faith in relationship with all of God's creation. This environmental challenge has fundamental moral and ethical dimensions that cannot be ignored.

Bible Version of the Ten Commandments:

Exodus 20: 2-17

- 1 “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.
- 2 “You shall not make for yourself a carved 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 nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My Commandments.
- 3 “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.
- 4 “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.
- 5 “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you.
- 6 “You shall not murder.
- 7 “You shall not commit adultery.
- 8 “You shall not steal.
- 9 “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
- 10 “You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's.”

Bible Version of the Beatitudes: Matthew 5: 1 - 12

When he saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he had sat down, his disciples came to him.

2

He began to teach them, saying:

3

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

4

Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.

5

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.

6

Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.

7

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

8

Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God.

9

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

10

Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11

Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you, falsely, because of me.

12

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven."

Works of Mercy

The Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy are actions we can perform that extend God's compassion and mercy to those in need.

Corporal Works of Mercy

The Corporal Works of Mercy are these kind acts by which we help our neighbors with their material and physical needs.

feed the hungry
shelter the homeless
clothe the naked
visit the sick and imprisoned
bury the dead
give alms to the poor

Spiritual Works of Mercy

The Spiritual Works of Mercy are acts of compassion, as listed below, by which we help our neighbors with their emotional and spiritual needs.

instruct
advise
console
comfort
forgive
bear wrongs patiently

The Precepts of the Catholic Church

1. *You shall attend Mass on Sundays and on holy days of obligation and rest from servile labor.*

We must “sanctify the day commemorating the Resurrection of the Lord” (Sunday), as well as the principal feast days, known as Catholic holy days of obligation. This requires attending Mass, “and by resting from those works and activities which could impede such a sanctification of these days.”

2. *You shall confess your sins at least once a year.*

We must prepare for the Eucharist by means of the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession). This sacrament “continues Baptism’s work of conversion and forgiveness.”

3. *You shall receive the sacrament of the Eucharist at least during the Easter season.*

This “guarantees as a minimum the reception of the Lord’s Body and Blood in connection with the Paschal feasts, the origin and center of the Christian liturgy.”

4. *You shall observe the days of fasting and abstinence established by the Church.*

“The fourth precept ensures the times of abstinence and penance which prepare us for the liturgical feasts and help us acquire mastery over our instincts and freedom of heart.”

5. *You shall help to provide for the needs of the Church.*

“The fifth precept means that the faithful are obliged to assist with the material needs of the Church, each according to his own ability.”

Gospel of Matthew 25 - The Last Judgment

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne, and all the nations will be assembled before him. And he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink?

When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you?

When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?'

And the king will say to them in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.'

Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink,

a stranger and you gave me no welcome, naked and you gave me no clothing, ill and in prison, and you did not care for me.'

Then they will answer and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison, and not minister to your needs?'

He will answer them, 'Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me.' And these will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

