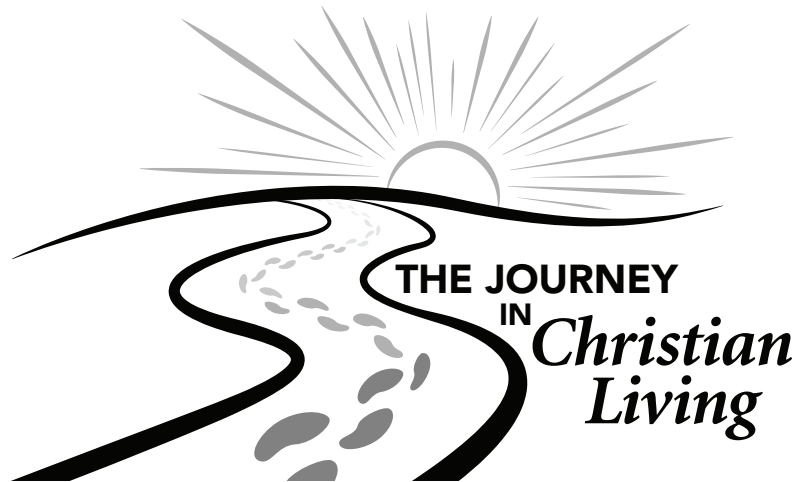


GRADE EIGHT

MORALITY



Through our relationship with Jesus, we grow in an ever-deepening awareness of who God is, who we are, and how God calls us to live. Catholic Christian morality gives direction to our response to God's call.

OBJECTIVES

- To help the young adolescent grow in an understanding of the moral responsibilities arising from one's relationship with Jesus.
- To help the young adolescent understand what conscience is and how to form his or her conscience according to the Catholic faith.
- To help the young adolescent learn basic concepts of morality and develop skills for moral decision-making.
- To help the young adolescent to recognize the role of the Holy Spirit and the witness and guidance of the Catholic Christian community in moral living.

I. DEFINITION OF MORALITY

As Catholic Christians, we need to remember the great dignity we possess through our Baptism. We have become temples of the Holy Spirit and share in the life of the risen Lord. We must live in accordance with that dignity through our moral conduct. [1691-92, 1694-95]

Morality is the quality of our actions whereby they are right or wrong. Actions are morally right when they are in agreement with God's law and will. [1749, 1786, 1950]

God's will for us is that in our lives we become like Jesus. God's will is always for our good. "God wants you all to be holy." (1 Thessalonians 4:3) [50, 218, 271]

Jesus is the model for morally right living. He most effectively teaches us how to live in harmony with the Creator, others, ourselves, and indeed the whole created world. [459, 520, 1693]

II. THE BASIS OF CATHOLIC MORALITY IN THE LIFE AND TEACHING OF JESUS

A. Jesus' Relationship with God the Father

Throughout his years on earth, Jesus lived in an intimate relationship with God, his Father, and was always obedient to God's will. This faithful response is revealed throughout Jesus' life as well as in his death and resurrection. [516, 615, 1693]

Jesus invites all people to that same kind of fidelity. He is the model for Christians, for he said, "I am the way and the truth and the life." (John 14:6) [519, 1596, 1698]

B. Jesus' Teaching on the Commandments

In his teaching, Jesus builds on the covenantal relationship between God and the people of Israel, revealed in a particular way in the Ten Commandments. The first three commandments concern our relationship with God. The last seven concern our relationship with our neighbor.

1. I am the Lord your God; you shall not have strange gods before me.
2. You shall not take the name of the Lord, your God, in vain.
3. Remember to keep holy the Lord's 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 wife.
10. You shall not covet your neighbor's goods.

(Exodus 20:1-17 and Deuteronomy 5:1-21) [1961, 1964, 2057, 2060, 2067]

These commandments are summed up by Jesus in the Great Law of Love: “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:37-39; see also Mark 12:28-31) [1822, 1967]

C. Jesus’ Teaching on Love

Jesus adds to this teaching a radically new dimension:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matthew 5:43-48) [1826-28, 1972]

Jesus is the perfect model of this unconditional love and calls each Christian to follow him in living this love. [520, 1823]

D. Jesus’ Vision of the Kingdom

Jesus describes God’s kingdom as a place where justice, peace and love reign. While the fullness of this kingdom will only be found in heaven, it has already begun here on earth, wherever God’s will is being carried out. [1717, 1721, 1726, 2046]

The Beatitudes reveal the way of living that characterizes God’s kingdom:

*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are you when people 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 ... (Matthew 5:3-12) [1716-17, 1719]*

E. Jesus’ Invitation to His Disciples

All people are created with the gift of freedom (the power to act or not to act, according to reason and will). This freedom is meant to be a force for growth and good. [1704, 1712, 1731]

However, in all human beings an attitude of self-centeredness often dominates (e.g. “what’s in it for me”). A life marked by choosing the good as God sees it and putting God and others ahead of ourselves is not easy. It calls for a turning away from our basic tendency toward self-centeredness. [1432, 1714, 1739]

Jesus calls his disciples to use their freedom to choose to follow the way of love rather than the way of selfishness. [1730-31, 1749]

Through conversion we turn away from selfishness and the isolation to which it leads. Conversion is the life-long process of responding to God's call to "change our heart." Jesus calls each of us to discipleship through conversion. [1427, 1431, 1721, 1888, 1949]

PRAYER EXPERIENCE

Remind the young people that before his conversion, Zacchaeus the tax collector was cheating people. Invite the young people to listen as you read the story of how Jesus called Zacchaeus to change (Luke 19:1-10).

Ask them to think of times when their conscience has caused them to stop in the midst of what they are doing and called them to change.

Saint John Henry Newman said, "Once we become friends with Jesus our lives change." Ask the young people to think about ways they may act differently because they are friends of Jesus.

Conclude with the Prayer of St. Francis:

*Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.
O, Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love;
For it is in giving that we receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.*

III. LEARNING TO CHOOSE

A. Fundamental Choices

The book of Deuteronomy sets before the people of God the challenge to make a fundamental commitment to a life centered on God:

Hear then, I have set before you life and prosperity, death and doom. If you obey the commandments of the Lord, your God, which I enjoin on you today, loving him, and walking in his ways, and keeping his commandments, statutes and decrees, you will live and grow numerous, and the Lord, your God, will bless you ... If, however, you turn away your hearts and will not listen, but are led astray and adore and serve other gods, I tell you now that you will certainly perish ... I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live, by loving the Lord, your God, heeding his voice, and holding fast to him ... (Deuteronomy 30: 15-20) [1696]

Created with free will, we choose how we will live. Our choices affect not only our life here on earth, but also our life hereafter. [1724, 1732]

Jesus confirms this in his depiction of the Last Judgment:

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 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, ill and in prison and you did not care for me ...' And these will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life. (Matthew 25: 34-36, 40-43, 45-46) [1696]

Self-centered living leads to unhappiness in this life and ultimately to eternal punishment: separation from God. [1696, 1861]

Choosing to lead a God-centered life is not easy. At its heart is the call to conversion. As Jesus said, "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me." (Matthew 16:24) [618, 2002]

God-centered living inevitably bears fruit in love, joy and peace in this life, and leads finally to eternal life with God and the saints in heaven. [1709, 2012-13]

B. Definition of Conscience

Conscience is the inner sense or power by which we judge an act to be right or wrong. [1776-78, 1796]

As Catholics our conscience is based on:

- The natural law, that is, the basic awareness of right and wrong written by the Creator in the hearts of all people and found in the Ten Commandments (Decalogue), and
- Our understanding of right and wrong as expressed in the laws of God, the laws of the Church, and the laws of a just society based on Catholic Social Teaching. (1780, 1952, 2030)

C. The Development of Conscience

Learning to know and to choose the good which God desires is for each of us a lifelong process of conscience formation. Our conscience helps us to make good moral choices. [1730, 1784, 1798]

The process of conscience formation involves learning to know and understand both God's law and the Church's teaching. [1783-85, 2039]

- The law of God is found in our hearts and is revealed to us in Scripture. [1785]
- The Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, plays an essential role in helping us to know the morality of various actions and attitudes. The Church's magisterium – the Pope and bishops in their role as teachers – preach to the people of God the faith which is to be believed and applied in moral life and continue to address new moral dilemmas as they arise. Guided by the commandments, the beatitudes, Jesus' law of love, all of revelation, our Catholic tradition and the community's experience, the Church gives direction to our choices. [1785, 2032, 2034, 2037]

Conscience formation also entails our own personal openness to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In Baptism and Confirmation we receive the power of the Holy Spirit to help us discern and do what God requires of us in a particular circumstance. [1266, 1302-03, 1785, 2038]

We develop our conscience by integrating into our thoughts, decisions, and our very being what the law of God and the teachings of the Church tell us. [1786-88, 1794]

It is our duty to develop our conscience according to the laws of the Church.

Legitimate authority is necessary in every human community. It is our responsibility to obey the just laws of society. [1897-99, 1916, 2239]

Nevertheless, when we make choices according to our conscience, we will at times find ourselves in direct conflict with the society around us. [1869, 1903, 2244]

- The fact that something is legally acceptable does not necessarily make it morally right. [1902, 2050]
- What is identified as morally wrong by the natural law, the law of God, the teaching of the Church, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit may be condoned by our society or even protected by its law, for example, abortion. [2256, 2270-71]
- As authentic teachers, the bishops pronounce on moral questions that fall within natural law and reason. [2050]
- We are called by our baptism to build a just and peaceful society. This involves not only choosing what is morally right for ourselves, but also working to make laws which reflect moral goodness. [1915-16, 2255]

D. Elements of a Moral Decision

There are three elements in a moral decision: the *object*, the *intention* and the *circumstances*. [1750]

- The ***object*** is the action itself, the thing which is done. [1751]
- The ***intention*** refers to the person's goal or purpose in doing the action. [1752]
- The ***circumstances*** are the particular features of each individual situation in which an action is taken. [1754]

The object may be good or evil in itself. For example, it is good to give to the poor. Lying is evil. [1751]

The intention may also be good or evil. [1752]

- A good intention does not make something which is evil into something good, however. For example, lying with the intention of obtaining something good does not make it good to lie. The end does not justify the means. [1753]
- A bad intention, furthermore, can make something which is ordinarily good into something evil. For example, pretending to be a friend to someone, for the sake of gaining some advantage for ourselves, makes a friendly action hollow, deceptive, and therefore morally wrong. [1753]

All morally good decisions are both good in their object and in their intention. [1755]

The circumstances, including the consequences, do not make a bad action good or a good action bad, but they may increase or decrease the good or evil of the action. For example, Jesus points out that the widow who gave two small coins, which was all she possessed, was more generous than the rich people who gave large sums (Mark 12:41-44). [1754]

Circumstances can affect the degree of responsibility one bears as well. For example, the responsibility of those who act out of fear or ignorance is less than that of those who make a deliberate choice without fear, knowing what they are doing. [1754]

E. The Process of Making a Good Moral Choice

Throughout our lives, we will be faced with situations which require of us a moral choice. Sometimes, especially if we are in the habit of doing good, these choices may seem simple and we are able to make them without a great deal of reflection: We decide to tell the truth rather than to lie, we decide to be kind rather than to be cruel, we decide to be fair rather than to cheat. [1777, 1804]

At other times, however, moral decisions can be complex and difficult, and the temptations to choose other than the good can be great. Having formed our conscience, we must listen to it as we utilize the following decision-making process:

- Reflect on all aspects of the situation and the various possible courses of action open to us.
- Pray for the help of the Holy Spirit.
- Recall God's law and the Church's teaching.
- Consider the consequences of the choice.
- Seek trusted, respected, and competent advice when necessary.
- Remember Jesus is with us and speak with him about the choice.
- Recall that our decision will affect our relationship with God and others. [1787-89]

In utilizing this decision-making process, we must make every effort to arrive at a decision of conscience which is correct and certain.

- A decision of conscience is correct when it is in conformity with the will of God.
- It is *certain* when we have no serious doubt about the rightness of our decision.

Once we have confronted a situation that requires a decision and have followed a process of discerning God's will in that situation, making every effort to arrive at a correct and certain decision of conscience, then we are obliged to act in accordance with that decision and trust in God's mercy. [1790, 1800]

F. Dealing with Temptation

Often we feel drawn to make selfish choices which are against the will of God. This experience is called temptation. [2846-47]

In itself, temptation is not a sin. Still, it is the responsibility of every person to recognize and avoid the persons, places, things and situations which might lead us into temptation. [2848]

The Gospel account of Jesus' temptations in the desert shows that the devil uses many means of tempting. Jesus is our model, because he turned away from what the devil offered and chose the will of God. [2849]

G. Failure to Choose the Good as God Sees It

Sin is deliberately choosing not to do God's will. Some examples are:

- Instead of honoring the Lord's Day, some choose not to participate at Mass.
- Instead of respecting the property of others, for example, we cover it with graffiti or destroy it.
- Instead of recognizing people's rights to their own property, we steal it.
- Instead of safeguarding and respecting human life, assisted suicide, euthanasia, and abortion are tolerated and murders take place.
- Instead of telling the truth, we tell lies.
- Instead of honoring God's name, we use it to curse others or to express our anger.
- Instead of trusting in God's providence and care for us, we put our faith in superstitious practices.
- Instead of respecting and caring for our bodies, we abuse drugs, alcohol, food and sex.
- Instead of respecting and obeying those in authority, we show contempt for them and disobey them.

In other words, instead of doing what God wants, we choose what we have convinced ourselves is good. [1707, 1847-50, 1871]

Mortal sin is the complete turning away from God and God's law. This free, deliberate refusal to accept God's will causes a spiritual death or separation from God. A sin is mortal if the three following conditions are met:

- The action is a grave evil in itself.
- The person has a clear knowledge of the action, that is, one fully understands the evil he or she would be doing.
- The person gives it his or her full consent, that is, one makes a sufficiently deliberate personal choice to sin. [1854, 1856-61, 1874]

Venial sin is not serious enough to break our relationship with God, but it weakens that relationship because it is an action we know is wrong yet freely choose to do it. The continual committing of venial sin can lead us to commit mortal sin. A habit acquired by repeated sin engenders vices. [1854-55, 1862-63, 1875]

Capital sin is the name given to the seven basic tendencies which are part of our sinful nature and the chief sources of sin in our lives. [1865-66]

- *Pride* is a disordered action in which one is seeking praise and honor, and a denial of the real nature of our relationship as obedient children of a loving God. [2094, 2540]
- *Covetousness (Greed)* is a disordered desire for possessions and material things. [2514, 2536]
- *Lust* is a disordered desire for sexual pleasure. [2351, 2529]
- *Envy* is the resentment of another person's talents, personal success or good fortune. [2538-40, 2553-54]

- *Gluttony* is a disordered desire for food and drink. [2290]
- *Anger* is disordered rage which causes one to seek revenge or desire injury to another. [2259, 2262, 2302]
- *Sloth* is a disordered desire to avoid our duties and responsibilities toward God and others. [2094, 2733]

Sin not only jeopardizes our relationship with God, it also has an impact on the entire community. Failure to love lessens the bond of love among us all. [1440]

Sins of individuals can give rise to social situations and institutions opposed to God’s goodness, such as slavery, child labor, prostitution, human trafficking, racism, ecological abuse, and the exploitation of third world countries for profit. Structures which perpetuate violence, injustice, and other disorders in society are called “social sin.” Social sin is an outgrowth of personal sins, and leads its victims to do evil. [408, 1869]

PRAYER EXPERIENCE

Lead the young people in an examination of conscience based on the Stations of the Cross. After each question, allow time for silent reflection.

- *Jesus was accused unjustly.* Has this ever happened to you? How did you deal with it? Have you ever accused someone unjustly?
- *The cross that Jesus carried was very heavy.* Do you ever feel as if you carry a heavy burden which causes you to feel sad or upset? What do you do at a time like this? Have you ever caused someone to carry a heavy burden?
- *On the road to Calvary, Jesus fell three times.* Have you ever been made to feel like a failure, as if you had not done your part? How did it feel? Have you ever made others feel like failures, making fun of them, or abandoning them?
- *Simon of Cyrene helped Jesus to carry his cross.* Have you ever neglected to help someone when you could have done so?
- *As Jesus hung on the cross, he forgave those who put him to death.* Have you ever been unable or unwilling to forgive someone who hurt you?

Through all his suffering, Jesus trusted that his Father would deliver him. Let us trust that God is always loving, saving, and forgiving us. Conclude by praying the Jesus Prayer:

*Lord Jesus Christ,
Son of the living God,
Be merciful to me, a sinner.*

IV. THE SUPPORTS FOR MORAL LIVING

All people are called to live a moral life. We support one another in living out this calling. [1949, 2030, 2045]

A. Personal Prayer and Openness to the Holy Spirit

The development of a life of prayer is one of the best supports for a moral life. God is with us and, through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, we discover within ourselves the ability to choose God's will regardless of the cost, even if it be the cost of our very life. [1811, 2544, 2745]

B. The Witness of the Community

All Catholic Christians belong to a community of faith. All the members of the community (our families, the people in our parish, our friends and teachers in our school or parish religious education program) are called to support us with the witness of their lives. Together we strive to be faithful to the love of God in Jesus Christ. [1253, 2030, 2044-46]

C. Sacraments as Nourishment and Strength

The sacraments of Penance and Eucharist are graced events which develop and nourish our moral life. [2031, 2040-41]

The sacrament of Penance gives us the opportunity to receive God's merciful forgiveness and be reconciled to God, the community, and ourselves. [1468-69]

In the sacrament of the Eucharist, we hear anew the call to love, we remember Jesus' willingness to embrace death to save us from our sins, and we receive the real presence of Jesus, his Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity as strength for our journey. [1391-1395, 2031]

As we live out our baptismal calling day by day, we become for others a sign of Christ's presence in the world. The more we share the life of Christ and progress in his friendship, the more difficult it is to break away from him by mortal sin. [1253-54, 1395, 2073]

D. The Communion of Saints

We also have the support of the Communion of Saints, that is, the whole community of the disciples of Jesus: those on earth, those in heaven, and those who are being purified in purgatory before coming into glory, and living face-to-face with God. We can call on them to pray for us as we struggle to live the life Jesus calls us to live. At the Eucharist when we eat the Bread of Life we are called to pray for one another and for those who have died. [954-57, 1474-75]

PRAYER EXPERIENCE

In consultation with your parish director or coordinator of religious education, school principal, and/or parish clergy, plan a celebration of the Sacrament of Penance using the Rite outlined below and involve the young people in the planning. Encourage them to go to confession during the celebration.

Rite for Reconciliation of Several Penitents with Individual Confession and Absolution:

- Introductory rites (hymn, greeting, opening prayer)
- Celebration of the Word of God
- Homily
- General confessions of sins (e.g. “I confess to almighty God . . .,” followed by a litany and the Lord’s Prayer)
- Individual confession and absolution
- Proclamation of praise for God’s mercy
- Concluding prayer of thanksgiving
- Concluding rite (blessing and dismissal)