

# CATHOLIC MORAL TEACHING



## Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, you offer to us the words of everlasting life. In your Sermon on the Mount, you teach us the secrets of happiness and instruct us in the path of holiness. Help us to live by your word and be people committed to following the Gospel and living according to your commands. We ask this in your most holy Name. Amen.

## Scripture Reading *Matthew 5:1-12*

At the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus teaches the crowd the secrets of happiness and holiness. The word "beatitude" in Latin means supreme happiness or blessedness. Some scholars have even translated the word to mean "congratulations." Living according to the beatitudes is one of the foundations of a Catholic moral life.

## What are the basic foundation of Catholic Moral Teaching?

- **Rooted in Relationships**
  - We have a commitment to be disciples of Christ who are nourished by prayer (especially the Eucharist).
  - We share a relationship with God through Jesus with others and with self.
    - We learn by example and our relationships form who we are as people.
    - Though relationships vary, our basic attitudes are consistent, so that our relationship with God and our relationship with neighbor are similar.
  - Through our relationships, we live out virtuously, with loving God and neighbor key.
- **Rooted in Scripture**
  - Scripture forms the mind and penetrates the subconscious. Catholics look at the world through the stories of scripture (which are not always literal).
  - Old Testament law is never abolished, but is superseded through Christ.
  - Scripture contains General Teachings such as "love your neighbor" and "all are created in the image and likeness of God", but also contains specific teachings such as "do not kill" or "blessed are the pure of heart" or "never use an evil means for a good end."
- **Rooted in Natural Law**
  - Catholics are also bound to **Natural Law**, which can be summed up as "Do good, avoid evil."
  - We all have basic inclinations and needs, such as food, water, housing, work, etc. Good things fulfill these needs properly.
  - Humans can only know things as they are capable of being known.

### How do I discern the morality of a particular action?

- **Moral Discernment**
  - Some things are always wrong (Sin).
  - Some things are always right (Works of Mercy).
  - Some things are in between, which is where the virtue of prudence is necessary to decide what is the greatest good based on what is known.
- **The Moral Act**
  - **Object:** a good toward which the will deliberately directs itself. It is an act of will, in which reason recognizes and judges it to be or not to be in conformity with the true good.
  - **End:** intentionality and motive (which is subjective). The end is the first goal of the intention and indicates the purpose pursued in the act. It is concerned with the goal of the activity.
  - **Circumstances:** Qualificators that are secondary elements of the moral act. They contribute to the moral goodness or evil of human acts, diminish or increase responsibility.

### What is the purpose of living a Christian life?

- Christian life is life in Christ and is our share of grace;
- Christian life is not merely a life animated by Christian values and strives to do good and avoid evil; rather, it is an intimate participation in God's own life.
- The model of Christian life is Jesus himself. All things were created in Christ and created good, therefore when we seek the good, we seek Christ.
- Jesus called us not just to avoid evil, but also to do good, the promises of which are found in the **Beatitudes**.
- The Holy Spirit is "a gentle guest and friend who inspires, guides, corrects, and strengthens this life" (CCC 1697).

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## What are the main principles of moral theology?

- Catholic morality is systematic, in that our moral decisions are influenced by virtue and reason.
- Moral theology is based from Scripture (**Ten Commandments, Great Commandments**) and has been understood throughout the history of the Church, even until the present time.
- Moral theology understands some laws to be natural or divine law, while some laws are manmade for the wellbeing of individuals.
- Human freedom allows us to choose between good and evil, but also makes us responsible for our voluntary actions.
- The **Precepts of the Church** are given to help us develop a relationship with God through the Church. It defines the very minimum
- There are principles in Catholic Morality that are based on divine law, such as not being able to sacrifice one for the many, ordinary means must be taken to sustain life, and the need to always attempt to do good and live in love.

## Ten Commandments

1. I am the Lord your God; you shall not have strange gods before me.
2. Thou 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. Thou shall not kill.
6. Thou shall not commit adultery.
7. Thou shall not steal.
8. Thou shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
9. Thou shall not covet your neighbor's wife.
10. Thou shall not covet you neighbor's goods.

- Exodus 20:2–17 and Deuteronomy 5:6–21

## Two Great Commandments

1. You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, and with your whole soul, and with your whole mind, and with your whole strength;
2. You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

- Matthew 23:26

### Precepts of the Church

1. To assist at Mass on all Sundays and holy days of obligation.
2. To fast and abstain on the days appointed.
3. To confess our sins at least once a year.
4. To receive Holy Communion during the Easter time.
5. To contribute to the support of the Church.
6. To observe the laws of the Church concerning marriage.

### The Beatitudes

1. Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
2. Blessed are the meek: for they shall possess the land.
3. Blessed are they who mourn: for they shall be comforted.
4. Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice: for they shall have their fill.
5. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.
6. Blessed are the clean of heart: for they shall see God.
7. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.
8. Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

- Matthew 5:3-10

### What is sin?

- **Sin** is an offense against reason, truth, and right conscience; it is failure in genuine love for God and neighbor.
  - Sin is an offense against God. Sin sets itself against God's love for us and turns our hearts away from Him.
  - Sin is diametrically opposed to the obedience of Jesus, in which our salvation is made possible.
- **Mortal sin** destroys love in the heart of humans by a grave violation of God's law. It must be forgiven through the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
  - For a sin to be mortal, three conditions must be met:
    - The matter must be serious wrong (as specified by God's commandments).
    - The offender must know it is seriously wrong.
    - The offender must freely and completely consent to do it anyway.

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- **Venial sin** allows love to subsist, even though it wounds and offends it. Venial sin can be forgiven through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, but also through the reception of the Eucharist and acts of charity.
  - The repetition of venial sins can lead to mortal sin, as they can engender vices and capitulate us to turn from God.
- **Capital sins** (or deadly sins) are vices that encourage other sins. While various lists of capital sins have been developed, the Catechism recognizes them as pride, avarice, envy, wrath, lust, gluttony, and sloth.
- **Social sin** is the structure of sin that is the expression and effect of personal sins. Sins give rise to social situations and institutions that are contrary to the divine goodness. Sin makes men accomplices of one another and causes concupiscence, violence, and injustice to spread. This structure of sin constitutes social sin.
- To avoid sin, one's conscience must be well formed over a lifetime. **Conscience** is a judgment of reason in which a person recognizes the moral quality of an act. One must form himself in knowledge of Christ and the Gospel; conscience is formed through prayer.