

St. Gabriel of Our Lady of Sorrows
5271 Clinton Street, Elma, NY 14059
Jean Czerniak, Director
(716) 668-4017

Home Study Lesson 8

Conscience and Prayer

GOAL

The goal of this Life Night is to help teens understand that forming our conscience is an integral part of the Christian life and to challenge them to form their consciences in an intentional manner, rather than allowing the prevailing culture to form it for them. Furthermore, the goal of this night is for the middle school youth to be equipped with different tools and guides that can aid in their growing prayer life.

TEACHING

CONSCIENCE

CALIBRATE YOUR COMPASS

Compasses used to be very important. Today, we have mostly replaced them with GPS systems and Google Maps, but the idea is the same. These are tools that help us get to where we want to go.

God knew that we would face problems that make us feel lost. He knew that we would be faced with difficult decisions, not necessarily knowing how we got there. So He gave us a spiritual compass so that we can always know how to get to our ultimate destination: heaven. This compass is called our conscience.

Our conscience is the inner voice that reminds us of God's Law. The prophet Jeremiah prophesied that when God gave us the New Covenant, He would "place his law within [us] and write it on [our] hearts." This is what our conscience does:

it helps us to live according to God's Law and to avoid sin. And if we form our consciences well, then our conscience will speak God's words to us.

Pause and read Jeremiah 31:33 and CCC 1777

However, near a strong enough magnetic field, a compass stops pointing north and instead points in the direction of the magnet. Or if we don't update or charge our GPS, we get lost. Our consciences sometimes do something similar. We aren't perfect and neither is our understanding of God's law. Sometimes certain topics, or problems, or decisions can act as "magnets" or "un-updated software" to our spiritual compasses, pointing us in the wrong direction.

Sometimes our conscience tells us it's okay to copy our friend's homework and turn it in as our own; we were really busy last night, and it's not important anyway. Or you might find yourself saying that it's okay to tell that lie to your parents about where you are going: it's not like it's going to be dangerous or anything. Or maybe you've thought it's okay to go to that party and get drunk: everyone else is doing it.

BLISSFULLY IGNORANT?

See, everyone is going to follow his or her conscience. In fact, the Church tells us that we have to follow our conscience. Otherwise we are intentionally doing something that we believe to be wrong. It would be like taking a test, knowing the correct answer is "A," but choosing "B" anyway. The real problem occurs when we really think the correct answer is "B" but it turns out to be "A." And just because we didn't know it was wrong doesn't mean we aren't responsible. In fact, in some cases, we might be more responsible.

Stick with the analogy of the test for a minute. What possible reasons could there be for you to think that a wrong answer is actually the right one?

Sometimes, a teacher might not prepare you well enough for a certain question and so you get it wrong. In that case, the teacher might throw that question out because it's not your fault that you got it wrong. In the same way, sometimes when we do something wrong out of ignorance, we aren't as responsible for it. This is called "invincible ignorance." Invincible ignorance is when we are ignorant of an issue on morality because there is something preventing us from

overcoming that ignorance (mental capacity, life-situation, learning ability). In this instance, our responsibility for our errors is lessened or completely removed.

But sometimes we get a question wrong because the teacher told us to read pages five to eight and we said, "Nahhh." The information was readily available to us, and we should have known it. We just didn't put the work in. In that same way, God expects us to put the work in and to learn what He teaches and understand why He teaches that. If we don't, we can end up being more responsible for doing something wrong, even though we thought it was right. This is called "vincible ignorance." Vincible ignorance is when we are ignorant of an issue of morality but can and should overcome it. In this instance, we are held responsible for errors in judgment. CCC 1791

PRAYER

A lot of times in math class we are given a special formula to solve a problem or an equation. When we cannot figure out the correct answer, it is usually because we are using the wrong formula. We did not add, subtract, divide or take something away correctly, or we might just be really bad at math. Unlike math class, however, there is no formula for prayer. There is no right or wrong when it comes to praying. There are certain things that can help us pray, and we have the Holy Spirit to pray with us and teach us how to pray. The Holy Spirit is powerful and can help us solve the problems we may be faced with in prayer and in life.

These are just different ways to jump-start your prayer life. Remember that there are many ways to pray; these are tools to help you grow in your prayer. The important thing is that you give it a try!

Here are some ways to help you learn to pray and develop your prayer life:

1. The Bible: When we wonder how to pray, we seldom look to the Bible for guidance. The truth, however, is that the Bible is packed with praying people, and we can learn a lot from their examples. Sometimes we have to dig through Scripture for these prayer models. We do not always find an obvious guide to prayer, such as, "Lord, teach us to pray..." (Luke 11:1). But we can look for the stories of holy people and see how they prayed and handled different situations. Many Bible figures showed courage and faith, but others found themselves in

situations that brought out qualities they did not know they had. It just shows us that these people are not perfect, and there are a lot of ways that we can relate to them.

2. The Rosary: Sometimes we think of the Hail Mary as a quick, panicked prayer before our Math quiz or of a Hail Mary throw in a football game in that last moment of desperation. But, Mary is so much more, and asking for her to intercede for you can be very powerful! Mary brings all of our requests to her Son, and the loving Son always listens to His mother. The Rosary is a great and simple way to enter into prayer, to offer up our prayers to Christ with Mary, and to reflect on the life of Christ. (If your youth are not familiar with the Rosary, this might be a good opportunity to briefly explain to them how to pray a Rosary.

3. Mass: Pope Paul VI said, “The Mass is the most perfect form of prayer!” St. John Vianney said, “There is nothing so great as the Eucharist. If God had something more precious, He would have given it to us.”

The Church tells us that celebrating the Eucharist during the Mass is the “source and summit” of our Christian life. That means that our reception of the Eucharist and prayers at Mass on Sundays gives us strength to do good things the rest of the week. It also means that our prayer at Mass is so important that everything else we do should help us to prepare for it.

The word “Mass” is kind of funny. It came about because in the old days, when all the prayers were in Latin, the last words the priest or deacon said were “Ite, missa est”. It meant, “go, you are sent.” (We still hear these words today – “go in peace.”) The word missa came to be used to describe the entire prayer!

In the Catholic Church, the Mass is said not only every Sunday, but also every single day—many times a day! All over the world, all the time, Christians are gathering to remember Jesus’ gift of himself on the cross, and they renew that gift by receiving His body and blood in the Eucharist. Think for a minute about some of the words you say over and over each day. Do you ever get tired of hearing your family say “I love you”? Of course not! Saying “I love you” helps the love to grow. Mass is like that. The more we tell God how we feel, the more our love for God will grow.

4. Saints: Not only do those in heaven pray with us, they also pray for us. In the book of Revelation, John sees that "the twenty-four elders [the leaders of the people of God in heaven] fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and with golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints" (Rev. 5:8). Thus, the saints in heaven offer to God the prayers of the saints on earth.

What is comforting is that, with the saints, we have so many members of our Church in heaven to look out for us. Do you ever feel some days like you need all the help you can get? You can ask one of many patron saints for their assistance. They have been "put in charge" of various causes, occupations, and even countries, through popular traditions or by the Church. These saints are considered to be our protectors, as well as our intercessors.

These are just different ways to jump-start your prayer life. Remember that there are many ways to pray; these are tools to help you grow in your prayer. The important thing is that you give it a try!

Close by praying a decade of the Rosary.

Questions

1. What was something that you learned through this lesson?

6. Which one of them might you like to try to use? Why?

7. What can you continue to improve your prayer routine?