

JESUS TEACHES

KEY WORDS

Kingdom of God
parables
Transfiguration

Some fairy tales tell how bad rulers take over a good king's rightful realm. The king comes back in disguise and throws out the evildoers. He loves his people and shows them how to be good and happy.

Jesus Christ is that good king. God never forgets the world. He is always active in reaching out to his people, for example, by sending the prophets. The Son of God came in person to reclaim God's Kingdom and break the devil's power.

The Kingdom of God

Some travelers tell stories about distant places. They show maps and slides. They inspire you to want to go there also.

Jesus tells us about the **Kingdom of God**. It's not a specific place, but it starts in our hearts. John the Baptist declares, "The right time has come and the Kingdom of God is near! Turn away from your sins and believe the Good News!" (Mark 1:15). John

makes it clear that the Kingdom is made real when we live God's rule of love and goodness. It's what Heaven is like. It's what the earth could become if we all followed Jesus. The Kingdom of God is present wherever the children of God are.

Good teachers show us how to do things. They lead us through math problems. They walk us through basketball plays. Jesus does not just tell us about the Kingdom of God. He is "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). He shows us how we should live to be a seed of the Kingdom. He promises the power of the Holy Spirit to help us live in the Kingdom.

All of Jesus' life teaches us. He teaches by what he says and by his silence. He teaches by his big miracles, his smaller acts, and his prayers. He teaches by his love for people, especially people who are poor or in need. He teaches by his willing sacrifice on the cross and his rising from the dead.

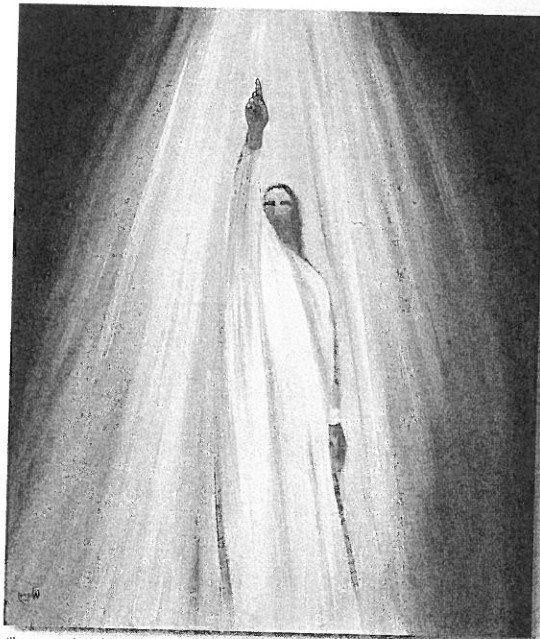


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Jesus was not the kind of king Israel was expecting. How was Jesus different from their expectations?

In the past God spoke to our ancestors many times and in many ways through the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us through his Son. (Hebrews 1:1-2)

Did You Know?

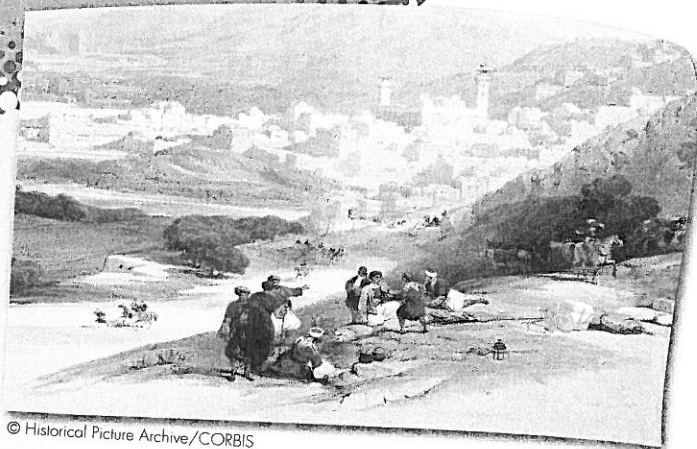
John the Baptist's Mission

As the last prophet before the coming of Jesus Christ, John the Baptist's mission is to "prepare a road for the Lord" (Matthew 3:3). John calls people to repent and reform. For their own good, he corrects those who have done wrong. He practices the self-control he preaches by living in the desert on "locusts and wild honey" (Matthew 3:4).

John also puts the Messiah's role above his own ego. "I am not good enough even to carry his sandals" (Matthew 3:11). He sends his own disciples to follow Jesus (see John 1:35-36). "He must become more important while I become less important" (John 3:30). Herod finally beheads John for correcting him (see Mark 5:17-29).

Jesus praises John's firmness and humility in leading others to Christ. "John is greater than anyone who has ever lived" (Luke 7:28).

Jesus grew up in a small town. He must have been like most boys and young men of his time. What do you think it would have been like to grow up with Jesus?



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LIVE IT!

In the Bible, prophets sometimes foretell the future. Their main mission, though, is to speak for God. Jesus acts as a prophet when he teaches about the Kingdom in his Father's name.

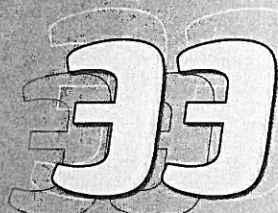
Everyone who is baptized shares in Christ's prophetic mission. We do so in many different ways. But whenever we reveal God's Kingdom in word or action, we help pass on Jesus' teachings.

For instance, you may teach younger kids a prayer or correct their behavior. You might answer a friend's questions about your faith or give good moral advice to the friend. You may pray with friends in hard times. If you try to follow Christ daily, you will teach others by example. Sometimes you may have to stand up to others and argue for what is right. What else might you do?

Jesus Teaches in His Hidden Life

When he is about thirty years old, Jesus begins his public life as a teacher. Before that, he lives quietly in a tiny, rural town. This early period of his life is sometimes referred to as his "hidden life." The Gospels record only a few of his words during this time. How does he teach us by being so hidden and silent?

Jesus shows us that an ordinary life, lived well with love of God and others, has great worth. After all, Jesus, who is God, lived as you might have lived back then. Enjoying and helping family and friends were part of his life. So were studying, working, playing, praying, and worshiping with his community.

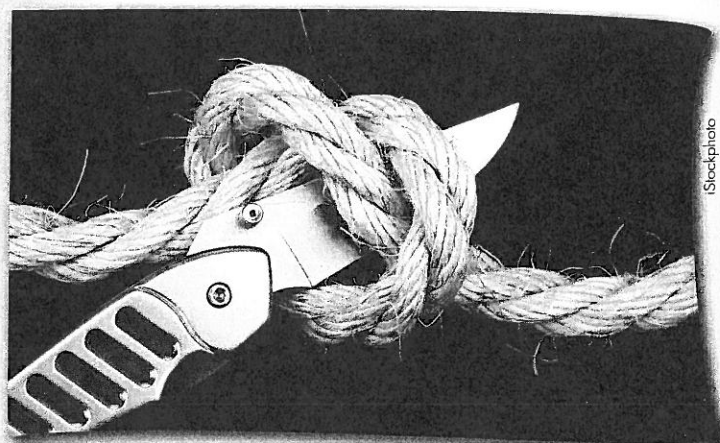


MORAL Decision MAKING

Have you ever felt tangled in temptation or tied up in a knot of lies? You may at times find yourself cornered by conformity or choosing something convenient instead of what you know is right in God's eyes. The good news is that God offers us all kinds of help to be good—to be what he knows we can be.

Wouldn't it be nice to have a tool to cut through the tension and challenge of making good, moral decisions? Well, you do. It's your conscience. That's the God-given voice inside you that helps you use reason to judge whether an act is right or wrong.

How is your
conscience like a
knife? Find out
by reading
this page.



As with any good tool, you must not let your conscience get dull or rusty. Your conscience must be kept sharp to cut through life's challenges. A well-formed conscience is truthful and solid. It doesn't conform to peer pressure or popular trends but rather to the true good for which God made us. Conscience makes its judgments based on reason in a world that's not always reasonable. It's important to do all you can to sharpen or form your conscience.

The peace that Christ gives is to guide you in the decisions you make. (Colossians 3:15)

The Sources of Moral Actions

We consider three things when we judge the morality of an act: the object, the intention, and the circumstances. Let's use an actual tool—a hammer—as an example to explore the morality of human acts. A doctor can whap your knee with a rubber hammer to test your reflexes. Your little brother can whap the same knee, causing you serious pain while giving him a twisted sense of joy.

The object, or what's happening in both examples, is the use of a hammer to whap your knee. The intention differs. Your doctor cares about your health, unlike



PRAY IT!

Lord,
Sometimes it's
hard to do the
right thing. Help
me be stronger,
so when I have a
tough decision to
make, my choice will
please you. When I
mess up and sin, give
me the strength to say
I'm sorry. Your love will
restore me, Lord. Bring
me back to you.

Amen

your brother! Circumstances also are important. They can change the degree of goodness or evil in an act. For example, if your brother is only three years old, your pain may still be great, but he's not as guilty.

DID YOU KNOW?

Sins Both Great and Small

Venial sins are less serious sins. They are offenses against God's will that weaken our relationships with God and others, as well as hurting our personal characters. Sin is rooted in our free will, which is found in our hearts. Charity, or love, also lives in our hearts. Venial sin wounds charity but does not destroy it. In fact, with God's grace, charity can repair damage that venial sin does.

Ultimately, a person might commit a **mortal sin**, choosing on purpose to do something that goes seriously against God's Law. A mortal sin requires that you know you are committing a serious sin and that you freely choose to do it. You cannot commit a mortal sin by accident or if someone is forcing you to do it. This type of sin is called mortal because it can cause eternal death. If we don't seek forgiveness, mortal sin can mean eternal separation from God. It also destroys charity, which helps us love God. Without charity, we can't experience eternal happiness with God.

All three sources must be considered to make a judgment about the moral goodness of an act. Let's consider the following examples:

Object. Some choices are always wrong, no matter what good might come of them.

Moral evil isn't justified even if some good results. Scientists, for example, might cure diseases by research done on stem cells taken from human embryos (unborn babies), but human life is lost in the process. A good intention doesn't make an evil object good. People sometimes make this point by saying "the end doesn't justify the means."

Intention. It's wrong to pull a fire alarm at school to avoid taking a test, because your intention is bad. But it's a good act if there really is a fire and your intention is to warn people—the object, intention, and circumstances are all good.

Circumstances. There are times when responsibility for our actions is lessened or wiped out due to circumstances like ignorance, fear, or threats. For example, what if a school bully threatened to hurt your best friend if you refused to share test answers? If you help the bully cheat, the threatening circumstance lessens your responsibility for your actions.

We always have the right to exercise freedom, especially in moral and religious matters. But freedom doesn't give us the right to do or say anything we want. We may have freedom, but this does not lessen the importance of making good decisions.

It all comes down to having a conscience that is well formed. Our consciences can help us make the right choices by following God's law and human reason, or they can stray from reason and law and do wrong. Our consciences are like moral muscles. The stronger the muscle is, the more we can trust it. When our consciences are strong, we must obey their certain judgment. We exercise our consciences by thinking about the good and bad of every situation we encounter. But we're not on our own

FUN FACT

In 2005 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the Ten Commandments could not be displayed in public buildings if the main purpose were to promote religion. Things were different in 1956. To publicize his classic movie *The Ten Commandments*, director Cecil B. DeMille had public displays of the Ten Commandments erected around the country. Most were placed in or near government buildings.



PRAY IT!

Liturgy Connection

If you mess up in a team sport, you might say “My bad” to your teammates. It’s a quick way to admit something’s your fault.

At the start of Mass, we pray for forgiveness, admitting that we are sinners in need of God’s love and mercy. One prayer we sometimes say is the *Confiteor*, Latin for “I confess” (see appendix A, “Catholic Prayers”). It’s a way to admit to poor moral choices we’ve made or good things we’ve failed to do. It’s important to think about these words, because they help us remember that our poor choices hurt our relationships not only with God but also with the whole community.

Though this penitential rite seems routine, the act of publicly admitting our wrongs is a good spiritual exercise. It gears us up for the examination of conscience that we do before the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.

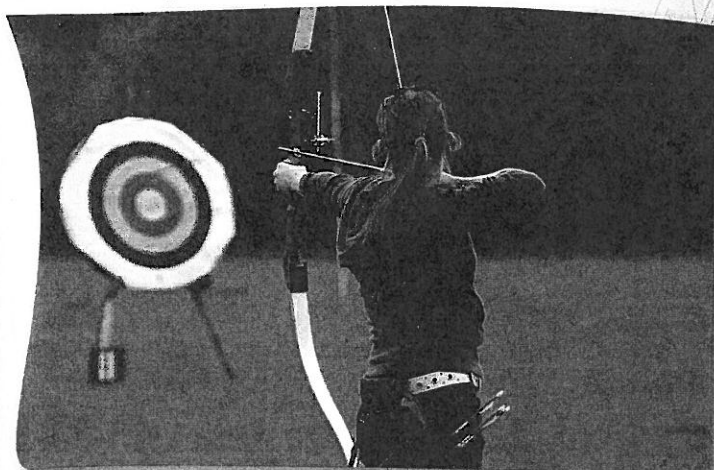
to figure things out. The Scriptures, Church teachings, prayer, and the guidance of holy people and the Holy Spirit all help us form our consciences and live the “good life.” That’s what God wants for us.

If we ignore our consciences and fail to develop them, we don’t escape responsibility for our actions. We are still responsible for our choices and any wrong we do. It is said that ignorance of the law is not an excuse for breaking it. A poorly formed conscience is no excuse for sinning either.

Aiming for God

If your life were an arrow, what would your target be? The Greek word we translate as *sin* was originally an archery term. It meant how far you missed the mark, or bull’s-eye. If eternal happiness with God is our target, sin is a sign we’ve gone astray.

Sin is anything we say or do that goes against God’s law. As followers of Christ, sin is a step off our path of following Jesus,



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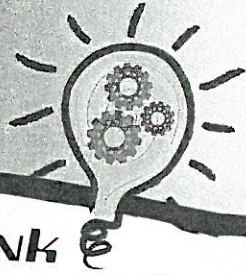
If your target is to be the kind of person God created you to be, how close are you to being "on target" in your everyday decisions?

who always obeyed God. Sin is a failure to love not only God but also our neighbors. This hurts our human nature and our relationships with others.

Jesus shows us that our relationships with God, others, and ourselves should be the focus of our lives. He teaches us that we must love God with all our beings and love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Christian morality aims for this target, that is, choosing to be the people God made us to be.

Sin often starts in small ways. Focusing too much on money and the things we want, for example, can come between us and God, as well as between us and our neighbors. Things, or the money needed to get them, become too important. We want more or better things than our friends have. Our things start to make us feel superior to some people and envious of others.

If you want to, you can keep the Lord's commands. You can decide whether you will be faithful to him or not. (Sirach 15:15)



THINK ABOUT IT!

Paul shared advice in his letter to the Colossians that's still important to us today. Read Colossians 3:1–17, then think about the things Paul says we need to get rid of and the traits we need to clothe ourselves with.

Paul tells us to “teach and instruct one another with all wisdom” (Colossians 3:16). What wisdom can you share with others that will help them live in a way that's pleasing to God? What is one thing that's worked for you as you seek Christ's peace?

Is it wrong to feel this way? For an answer, look to the Tenth Commandment, which tells us not to covet our neighbor's goods. Repeating sins may seem harmless, but doing so leads us to form bad habits called vices. Unlike virtues, vices make it easier to commit sin. They can become deadly sins called capital sins that distance us from God and others. (See the article “The Seven Deadly Sins” in this chapter.)

Whenever our sin separates us from God and from others, God wants to bring us back together. Through a process called **justification**, God restores our broken relationships after we have sinned. *Justification* is a word that refers to God's act of making us worthy of being united with him. God forgives our sins, makes us holy, and renews our spiritual lives. God gives us love, which helps us turn toward him and away from sin.

God's love makes all the difference. We are freed from sin, and we enter new lives made possible through Jesus' Passion, when he suffered and died for our sins. Our lives, now on earth and forever with God, are gifts given to us out of immense love. It is this love that supports and sustains us as we strive to make good moral decisions—decisions that keep us turned toward God, as well as those that get us turned back around after we do something wrong.

A good example of justification is Peter. He betrayed his friend—Jesus himself. On the night before Jesus died, Peter three times denied that he even knew Jesus. What could be worse? Yet after the Resurrection, Jesus welcomed Peter back and restored their relationship.

Rock-solid Guidance

Making good decisions is not always easy, but God and the Church offer us support. Natural law, the Ten Commandments, and, of course, God's grace help us. Something else the Church offers is a set of guidelines that help us grow in our love of God and neighbor. These are called the precepts of the Church (see appendix B, "Catholic Beliefs and Practices").

The precepts encourage us to do things that help us live the right way, such as worship with the community and seek forgiveness when we sin. When we participate in the life of the Church and make friends with people who are also trying to live the good life God wants for us, our decision making can be much easier than if we try to go it alone.

The teachings of the Pope and the bishops are a huge help to us too. In fact, their teachings are essential if we are to live as God wants us to live. They help us understand Christ's teachings and how they apply to the situations we encounter today. This is an important responsibility, and their

KEY WORDS

venial sin
mortal sin
justification
Magisterium
doctrine

Brian Singer-Towns, Saint Mary's Press



"Peter: you are a rock, and on this rock foundation I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18). With these words Jesus made Peter and all the popes that have followed him the spiritual and moral leaders of the Church.

Did You Know?

The Seven Deadly Sins

The Church warns us about seven very harmful sins. We call them capital, or deadly, sins because they lead us toward other sins and away from God. For example, the drive to have more and better stuff might lead us to steal, disrespect our parents, or value things over God. Following is a quick look at these sins:

- ♦ **pride:** the belief that you're better than others
- ♦ **greed:** an unhealthy desire for money and things
- ♦ **envy:** resentment against people who have more things, privileges, or success than you
- ♦ **wrath:** intense anger that leads us to get even instead of making things right
- ♦ **lust:** the out-of-control desire to enjoy yourself, especially in sexual ways
- ♦ **gluttony:** the practice of eating or drinking too much
- ♦ **sloth:** laziness, or slacking when action is needed