

October 18, 2020: Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

So, how does one come to create that well-formed conscience? Honestly, this is one of the most important questions a person can ask, and then to actualize the answer requires some hard work. It is not something that just happens naturally. Ultimately, to develop a well-formed conscience depends on cooperating with God's grace in our life and realizing our dependence on Him to accomplish any good we do. And creating that well-formed conscience is at the top of the list of the most important good we can do.

It begins with first accepting the principles stated earlier: God is the creator of all and gives all a purpose, end or order. We must seek to understand this truth and know what God intends, as revealed to us through the scriptures and teachings of the Church. God's plan is made known to us through these teachings, which leads one to a real and intimate relationship with Christ.

The process begins first and foremost with having a prayer life. If we are not communicating with God each and every day, then we cannot have a real relationship with Him. Think about any relationship you are in. The people you are closest to are the ones you communicate the most and best with. The same is true with God. Prayer is not an option in Christian life—to be fit in when convenient. We must open our hearts to God and that simply takes real time and effort on our part. People often tell me they are too busy for prayer. What they are really saying is that God is just *not* that important to me. I know that may sound harsh but it is true: we can *always* find time for the things that are important to us. And, unless we spend time with the Lord, it will be impossible to properly create a well-formed conscience.

Also important is coming to truly understand what the scriptures and the Church teaches. Too often I hear people say that something they believe is true when in fact it is not. I am also amazed when people say that something is the way it *should* be. Hence, if an idea from scripture or the Church diverges from their idea of truth, then the scriptures/Church teaching must be wrong. They, of course, cannot be wrong if a majority or large group agrees with them. As Christians, we are not concerned with group-thinking—only in what God thinks. It means we must again invest our time in coming to understand not simply *what* is taught but *why* it is taught. Many times ‘the why’ in Catholic teaching is more important than ‘the what’. Too often people stop at the what and say I do not agree with that teaching. The problem with staying on the surface (the what) is that they fail to understand what is being taught. Only when you dig down to the root of an issue (the why) can you recognize the cohesiveness of Church teaching. One may not agree with the teaching of the Church, but if you take the time to really understand, you can see that there is always a logical consequence of what the Church understands to be fundamental truths. Church teaching is always a progression of one truth leading to the next truth.

As important as it is to understand scriptures and Church teaching, we also must strive to understand ourselves. Again, most people think they know themselves when in reality they do not. Why do you think the way you do? What are *your* fundamental truths? How do you perceive the world and its purpose? How do you understand your own life and its purpose? How do you process information? How do you reconcile conflicting ideas or beliefs within yourself? How do you determine priorities when you need to make choices? How do you arbitrate conflicts of ideas that you may hold? These may seem like esoteric questions, but they actually begin to get to the very heart of our own self-identity. It is only when we challenge ourselves and begin to answer these and similar questions that we can really get a sense of how we see ourselves and how we choose to interact with the world. One's sense of self-identity is an important part of discerning one's sense of right and wrong. And only when we understand this can we begin the process of developing a well-formed conscience. Many people never really figure this out, and so they are unable to take their decision-making to the next level. It is only when we challenge ourselves in this way that we can begin to recognize what is good in our way of thinking and what needs to change.

Creating a well-formed conscience is not a simple process. All of these things need to be in place to ensure that you are really open to hearing the voice of the Lord. The reality is that a well-formed conscience is hard work because the ultimate goal is *not* to act in accord with *your* will, but rather, to act in accord with the will of God. We need only to remember that all Jesus did was always in accord with the will of his Father (“not my will, but your will be done”). Therefore, to have a well-formed conscience, we need to get to the point where we have truly emptied ourselves of our own wants and desires, and we seek to live a life completely attuned to the will of God.

Next week, we will look at how the well-formed conscience works, and then what that means for voting.

If you have any questions about anything, please do not hesitate to ask me directly, or send your questions to me at fr.brian@chelmsfordcatholic.org.

Please keep me in your prayers.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fr. Brian".

Fr. Brian