

Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility

Adult Education and Small Faith Community Sharing Session C

Theme: Avoiding Evil and Doing Good



Scripture Reading & Discussion Questions

A Reading from the Gospel of Matthew. . . (Matthew 19:16-21)

Now someone approached him and said, "Teacher, what good must I do to gain eternal life?"

He answered him, "Why do you ask me about the good? There is only One who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments."

He asked him, "Which ones?" And Jesus replied, " 'You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; honor your father and your mother'; and 'you shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

The young man said to him, "All of these I have observed. What do I still lack?"

Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to (the) poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

Discussion Questions

- 1) How do each of the commandments that Jesus lifted up relate to the life and dignity of the human person? How does the last instruction he gives relate to this theme?
- 2) How are the commandments that Jesus mentions related to one another? How are avoiding evil and doing good linked? How are they different?
- 3) How might these commandments relate to modern-day issues? What does it mean to "come follow" Christ in public life?

Faithful Citizenship Reading & Discussion Questions

Readings from *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States*:

Aided by the virtue of prudence in the exercise of well-formed consciences, Catholics are called to make practical judgments regarding good and evil choices in the political arena (no. 21).

There are some things we must never do, as individuals or as a society, because they are always incompatible with love of God and neighbor. Such actions are so deeply flawed that they are always opposed to the authentic good of persons. These are called “intrinsically evil” actions. They must always be rejected and opposed and must never be supported or condoned. A prime example is the intentional taking of innocent human life, as in abortion and euthanasia. In our nation, “abortion and euthanasia have become preeminent threats to human dignity because they directly attack life itself, the most fundamental human good and the condition for all others” (*Living the Gospel of Life*, no. 5). It is a mistake with grave moral consequences to treat the destruction of innocent human life merely as a matter of individual choice. A legal system that violates the basic right to life on the grounds of choice is fundamentally flawed (no. 22).

Similarly, direct threats to the sanctity and dignity of human life, such as human cloning and destructive research on human embryos, are also intrinsically evil. These must always be opposed. Other direct assaults on innocent human life and violations of human dignity, such as genocide, torture, racism, and the targeting of noncombatants in acts of terror or war, can never be justified (no. 23).

Opposition to intrinsically evil acts that undercut the dignity of the human person should also open our eyes to the good we must do, that is, to our positive duty to contribute to the common good and to act in solidarity with those in need. As Pope John Paul II said, “the fact that only the negative commandments oblige always and under all circumstances does not mean that in the moral life prohibitions are more important than the obligation to do good indicated by the positive commandment” (*Veritatis Splendor*, no. 52). Both opposing evil *and* doing good are essential obligations (no. 24).

The right to life implies and is linked to other human rights—to the basic goods that every human person needs to live and thrive. All the life issues are connected, for erosion of respect for the life of any individual or group in society necessarily diminishes respect for all life. The moral imperative to respond to the needs of our neighbors—basic needs such as food, shelter, health care, education, and meaningful work—is universally binding on our consciences and may be legitimately fulfilled by a variety of means. Catholics must seek the best ways to respond to these needs. As Blessed Pope John XXIII taught, “[each of us] has the right to life, to bodily integrity, and to the means which are suitable for the proper development of life; these are primarily food, clothing, shelter, rest, medical care, and, finally, the necessary social services” (*Pacem in Terris*, no. 11) (no. 25).

Discussion Questions:

- 1) What do the bishops mean when they say, “Both opposing evil *and* doing good are essential obligations” (no. 24)? Why are both (not just one or the other) important for Catholics?
- 2) What are examples of intrinsic evils and why must they always be opposed? What are examples of supporting the common good?
- 3) How is the bishops’ teaching on avoiding evil and doing good related to the reading from Matthew 19? How does this teaching from the bishops call Catholics to more authentically put their faith into action?
- 4) How can you personally respond to the call for faithful citizens to oppose evil *and* support good?