

Cycle A 26<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time  
Sunday October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017

The Church in the United States designates October as Respect Life month. This allows us the opportunity to learn and reflect on the various life issues from abortion and contraception to the death penalty, the dignity of matrimony between one man and one woman, to welcoming migrant people and end of life care. Of course this listing is only brief and is not inclusive of all life issues.

This year the bishops of the United States included in their Respect life materials, a document called “Understanding Conscience.” The inclusion of this teaching is essential for us so that we can properly understand what Christ is teaching through His Church guided by the Holy Spirit. Conscience is not about personal preferences, or picking and choosing like we are in a cafeteria. Rather, **conscience helps us hear the voice of God; it helps us recognize the truth about God and the truth about how we ought to live. Conscience is "a judgment of reason"<sup>1</sup> by which we determine whether an action is right or wrong.** Proper conscience formation requires the virtue of humility. This reminds us that we check our personal agendas at the door and submit ourselves to the will of Christ and His Church guided by the Holy Spirit.

There are three steps in the process of properly forming our conscience. Forming our conscience begins with the **duty “to do good and to avoid evil.”** The **duty “to do good and to avoid evil.”**

When deciding what is **good** and what is **evil**, we **do not** look to the relativistic secular culture, the government, some feel good book, or misleading websites. Instead we look to a voice of **authority**. Jesus Christ is our voice of authority and He speaks through **His Church** guided by the Holy Spirit. When we hear the voice of Jesus and listen to him we are following **His** will for us, not **our** will.

This brings us to the **second step** of forming our conscience. The Church is the authority that helps us to form our conscience. The Church provides consistent teachings on all aspects of our lives. How do you access this information? Where do you begin? We begin right here in this church by listening to the Word of God. **Reading and understanding** Church documents, such as the Catechism, “the Gospel of Life,” or statements from the bishops. Asking questions of parents, grandparents or godparents. Asking questions of myself or someone who is trained in moral theology, even going to conferences or talks that deal with serious moral issues. If we do not gather all of the **correct** information, this is where our conscience can and sometimes does **error**. Yes, our conscience can error! The **third step** of conscience formation is making a judgment. This means we have to act and take responsibility for our actions. We also have to take responsibility when we do not act.

The Scriptures today reveal a foundation for conscience formation. The Lord speaking through the prophet Ezekiel said: **“You say, "The LORD's way is not fair!" Hear now, house of Israel: Is it my way that is unfair, or rather, are not your ways unfair?”** We go on to hear about those who turn from virtue to iniquity and then die as a result. We also heard about those who turn from iniquity to do what is right and just, and shall preserve their life. The first instance reveals a conscience that has become damaged, while the second instance the conscience has been healed.

Jesus parable today similarly confirms what the Prophet Ezekiel taught. The first son did not go and work in his father’s vineyard. Then he changed his mind and went to work. The second son at first said yes but then did not carry out the work. Here we see the first son with a conscience that has been healed, while the second son’s conscience became damaged.

St. Paul gives us a good message to close with regarding our reflection on the importance of understanding conscience. **“Complete my joy by being of the same mind, with the same love, united in heart, thinking one thing. Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, each looking out not for his own interests, but also for those of others.”** If all of us have a properly formed conscience then we will all be of the same mind with the same love, united in heart, thinking one thing.