**Module Three, Lesson #2:** Conscience, Virtues, Gifts

CCC nn.1776-1845

*Last Two Weeks:*

Introduction: the catechetical context for catechesis on the Moral Life in Christ 1691-1699

I. The theological context for this catechesis: **Man as *homo viator* in the *imago Dei*** 1700-1715

N.B. presumes the nature of Man (*what* he is) and Man in the bigger picture of

the Journey of salvation history (*where* he is), all in Parts One & Two of the CCC

II. The goal of the moral life in Christ: our **vocation** **to** objective **Beatitude (Love)**  1716-1729

III. The nature of true **Freedom** to do excellently what ought to do to attain the goal 1730-1748

IV. The nature of free **human acts** that move us toward (or away from) the goal 1749-1761

Specifically: the symphony of intellect & will in choosing freely in truth for love

V. A closer look at our embodiment: the **passions** & their relation to choosing 1762-1775

*This Week:*

VI. A closer look at judgment of reason in light of truth for choosing freely: **conscience** 1776-1802

VII. The *intrinsic principle of human action* that perfects the powers of intellect & will for choosing freely: the cardinal & theological **virtues**, the **gifts** & **fruits** of the **Holy Spirit** 1803-1845

“The Christian moral life is emphatically not, as too many people mistakenly and unfortunately believe, basically a question of meeting obligations and obeying laws that inhibit human freedom. It is, rather, a matter of striving to become fully the beings God wants us to be, that is, persons who share forever his own divine life and happiness, an end attainable, with the help of God’s never-failing grace, by living a life of excellence, shaped by virtues, rooted in faith and hope, and animated by love.”

--William E. May. “Recent Moral Theology: Servais Pinckaers and

Benedict Ashley.” The Thomist, vol. 62, no.1 (Jan. 1998) 117.

# Prayer of St. Thomas Aquinas

**Grant me grace, O Merciful God,**

**to desire ardently all that is pleasing to Thee,**

**to examine it prudently,**

**to acknowledge it truthfully,**

**and to accomplish it perfectly**

**for the praise and glory of Thy Name. Amen.**

**Marvelous texts on our topic for today (all available on-line):**

• John Paul II: *Ad limina* address to US bishops of Region X, June 27, 1998.

• John Paul II: General Audiences on the virtue of Love, October 6, October 13, October 20, 1999.

• Cardinal George Pell: “The Inconvenient Conscience,” *First Things* 153 (May 2005).

• Cardinal George Pell: “The Dictatorship of Relativism” (Address to Australian National Press Club, September 21, 2005)

• James Stenson: ParentLeadership.com website and any of his books.

**Article VI. A closer look at judgment of reason in light of truth for choosing freely: conscience 1776-1802**

Cardinal John Henry Newman…*Gaudium et Spes*, 16…Cardinal George Pell

**THE PRIMACY OF SEEING TRULY IN ORDER TO BE FREE**

**Features of Conscience:**

• **What it is not:** Jiminy Cricket; Angel on one shoulder, Devil on the other;

“Feelings, nothing more than feelings…” (or even guilt or lack of guilt)…

• **What it is:** *cum scientia* = thinking “with knowledge”…for action

* CCC 1778 “**A** **judgment of reason**…”
* **Witness to the truth**; witness to the desire for happiness, for the Good & the True; witness to the natural hierarchy of the good & to norms of natural law; witness to one’s own dignity in *imago Dei*; witness to “possessing oneself”; witness to God’s call…
* **At the intersection of truth and human action**: ***synderesis*** “Do good, shun evil…” => most basic precepts of natural law => secondary & tertiary precepts of natural law…

• **Key feature #1**: Because we are made in *imago Dei* and are responsible for action, conscience is the **proximate, most immediate norm** for human action.

• **Rule #1: “You must always follow your conscience”**

• **Key feature #2:** Because we are made (contingent) AND fallen, conscience not only cannot determine reality / truth / right & wrong, but it is often mistaken! (cf. n. 1786). Conscience **is not infallible!** Can be sincerely wrong! Just because I decide something “in conscience” doesn’t make what I decide true and right…

• **Rule #2: “You must first educate & inform your conscience as fully & excellently as possible** in order to always follow it.” (n. 1783)

**N.B. Rule #2 must be followed first!!!!!!!**

• **Rules of Thumb** for following a fallible-and-needs-to-be-informed conscience: (1789)

1. One can never do evil in order to gain a good: the end never justifies the means
2. Golden Rule: “Do unto others what you would wish they do unto you”
3. Do not act against a doubtful conscience: if not sure this is allowed, do not act
4. Charity (the good of the other) prevails: do what most benefits the other
5. Integrity & consistency: Do privately as you would publicly.
6. Learn what Church in fact teaches, not what I think it teaches.

• **Vincible** **ignorance** (able to overcome) and **Invincible Ignorance** (not reasonably able to overcome): i.e, how to assess “But I didn’t know!” (CCC 1790-1793): Note how often we could’ve and should’ve!

• **Sources for informing and educating conscience** (n.b.: weight of sources varies!) (CCC 1783ff) :

* Natural Law
* Magisterium of Mother Church (cf. CCC 2030-2051) interpreting Sacred Scripture & Tradition (in all its dimensions) including the wisdom of liturgy
* The witness of the Apostles, Fathers, Saints, Martyrs…those who Suffer, those of outstanding Virtue
* Those with expertise in a given area, both theologically and with regard to the specific human sciences and fields of knowledge…always in light of Revelation
* Spiritual director & confessor
* Prayer and guidance of Holy Spirit
* Own prudent experience soberly assessed in light of the above & in light of the Cross of Christ pouring himself out

• A **primary responsibility of parents**: to educate the consciences of their children

• A significant responsibility **of schools & governors**: to educate the consciences of the children

• The **education of conscience:** **a lifelong task** connected to one’s changing circumstances &

vocation & work & career

• **What if “in conscience, I do not agree with the Church”?**

* Only the beginning point…of prayer, self-denial, humble study…
* Recognize it cuts both ways: the Church does not agree with you. There are consequences to our stance.

• **The “Examination of Conscience”** accordingto virtues, to one’s state in life and vocation, to deadly (capital) sins, to commandments, to one’s spiritual maturity…

**Even with a well-formed conscience, apart from virtue—me being effectively ordered toward the Goal, i.e., knowing, desiring, willing truly & excellently—there is no freedom, no holiness, no *Imitatio Christi*...**

**Article VII. The *intrinsic principle of human action* that perfects the powers of intellect & will for choosing freely:**

the cardinal & theological virtues, the gifts & fruits of the Holy Spirit (1803-1845)

• **Virtue, *habitus*** = a firm & habitual disposition (interior effective readiness) to recognize and choose for the good…consistently, easily, and joyfully—that is, freely. (READ 1804)

- CCC 1803: “[Virtue] allows the person not only to perform good acts, but to give the best

of himself. The virtuous person tends toward the good with all his sensory [passions] and spiritual powers [intellect & will]; he pursues the good and chooses it in concrete actions.

**‘The goal of a virtuous life is to become like God’** [St. Gregory of Nyssa].”

- Virtue is thus **a quality of character** (a quality of soul) that facilitates the achievement / possession of our highest happiness, life with God as friend (having the qualities of God).

* On analogous virtues for *techne* (art) and for intellect (wisdom, understanding, knowledge).

Hitting a baseball well…playing violin well…building a ship well…grasping the structure of the atom well…understanding social interactions well…

- We are **concerned with ACTING WELL** (i.e., to attain particular goods within proper order and to attain Greatest Good—to Love as Christ loves, to be as God is).

Particular virtues **perfect our intellect** (clarify), **perfect our will** (strengthen in right direction), and **govern our passions** (order, control) according to reason and faith for RIGHT / EXCELLENT ACTION. I don’t “use” virtue. Virtue IS me thinking and willing rightly, excellently, effectively.

**Virtues free us to love as Christ; virtues are thus** **the stamp of living in the H. Spirit.**

• **Four Human / Moral / Cardinal Virtues**: CCC 1805-1811 (The four main natural virtues upon which all others “hinge”) [See LIST OF 50+ VIRTUES from Thomas Aquinas]

The moral (human, cardinal) virtues are **mainly acquired by human effort**. They are the fruit of and seed for morally good actions. They dispose our powers of intellect, will, and passion for the Theological Virtues (communion with the Divine Love); they are **in turn elevated and strengthened by the graced action of the H. Spirit in order to help us reach our supernatural goal.**

**Freedom: Me ordered well toward all the created order in light of God.**

**1) Prudence (wisdom):** sound judgment / “right reason in action.” = the habitual capacity to choose and act wisely in any given situation. The “charioteer” of the other virtues. Built on conscience, orders love creatively. [DIAGRAM of how conscience & prudence are related]

**2) Justice:** fairness and responsibility = the habitual capacity to give what is due to another (God and neighbor). Justice toward God = religion. The guardian of rights, the enforcer of duties.

**3) Fortitude:** personal toughness / courage = the habitual capacity to be steadfast for the good in face of difficulties. Includes patience & endurance, longsuffering & largesse. The basis for witness & martyrdom.

**4) Temperance:** self-control / moderation / balance = the habitual capacity to moderate our appetite for pleasure and to balance our use of material things (“balance” is relative to the moral law and to our personal weakness/strength—not necessarily to our desire). Includes chastity (in its various forms, the integration and channeling of our sexual energy), moderation of anger, focus of mind, and humility (the proper, balanced view of ourselves in God’s eyes).

• N.B. On the virtues as a “**mean**” (perfection point) with **vices** to either side…

On the orientation and relativity of the different virtues…

On the **connection of the virtues**: the intemperate or fear-bound man will be unjust and

imprudent…

On the **supernatural (infused) version of the natural virtues**…

But without something more, *WE CANNOT ATTAIN THE GOOD OF HEAVEN.*

*WITHOUT FAITH, HOPE, LOVE... WE CANNOT GENERATE F, H, L....*

• **Three Theological Virtues:** CCC 1812-1832, 2086-2094, 2656-2658. Source, goal, power

come from God (**GIFT/ GRACE**) => to attain our SUPERNATURAL end (Beatitude).

**Freedom:Me Ordered well toward GOD HIMSELF. Connect ME with GOD.**

CCC 1813: The theological virtues are **the foundation of Christian moral activity**; they animate it and give it its special character. They inform and give life to all the moral virtues. They are **infused by God** into the souls of the faithful to **make them capable of acting as his children** and of meriting eternal life. They are the pledge of the presence and action **of the Holy Spirit** / **in the faculties** of the human being.

**1) Faith:** the theological virtue by which we believe in God and all that he has said and revealed to us. Assent to “this is so” (Amen!) based on the authority of the witness, God himself. **A firm grasp of Reality: “God is who He says He is, therefore I can do more because HE IS”** Animates our hope and love. Opposite: unbelief, therefore narrow focus on to self (and limitations)...

**2) Hope:** the theological virtue *by which we desire* & *keep* *moving toward* the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness. Confident expectation that God has both the will and the power to bring me to himself. **A firm movement toward God as “good for me” & “He’s on my side.”** Opposites: presumption and despair in face of difficulty, especially sin. “Be not afraid!”

**3) Love** (*caritas*, charity, *agape*, *hesed*): the theological virtue by which we love God as friend for his own sake above all things and love others (as ourselves) in light of God’s love for them. “To will the good for another.” God’s good is “man fully alive;” thus, to will the good for God is to surrender to God’s will for us, to be completely “given over” (lose self, give self away in sincere gift), to be utterly impacted by Who He Is. And thus, to see in others the same “image and likeness,” and to treat them accordingly. **A firm movement toward God (and others) for sake of his own goodness. “Yes!” to God, pure and simply: loving with the love with which God loves Himself. Love = “form” (aim, meaning, measure, mother of) of ALL virtue.**

**Happi-ness: Friend-ship with GOD**

• **Growing in Virtue:** (CCC 1810-1811, 2087-2103 (1st Commandment), 2514-2557 on 9th/ 10th Commandments—last session in this module)

* A symphony of action…only as sound as our weakest element
* Means to growth: ***Presuming we are by grace aiming at the goal (basic conversion) & are embracing the wisdom of the law****…****GRACE!!! THE LIFE OF PRAYER & SACRAMENTAL ACTION / WORSHIP IS THE LIFE OF GROWTH IN VIRTUE. (cf. School of Prayer)****.*

1. Imitation, modeling (in any discipline, but ultimately: Jesus, Mary, saints, martyrs…)
2. Capture imagination (story, biography, literature…)
3. Practice, repetition, discipline (daily life): **do the good, and eventually you will want to…**
4. Formal training by means of rules, scenarios, self-denial of will (home & school & rule of life)
5. The practice of prayer & repentance (**Grace**)…and **ask** for the infusion of H Spirit!
6. **Suffering**!!!!!
7. **Freedom:**  By Holy Spirit’s conviction & setting right, **learning one’s own virtue struggle, and surrendering to life-long healing & transfiguration:** divinization coming to fruition...

Cf. Dr. James Stenson’s website ParentLeadership.com and his books, handouts

**The sweet and lofty Height of What God Does in us.**

**• Gifts and Fruits of the Holy Spirit (CCC 1830-1832):** the Marvelous Exchange, divinization,

freedom coming to fruition / blossoming in this life = the life of Beatitude/ Heaven embodied now

**Gifts: Dispositions** that make us especially receptive (docile) to the movement & action of H Spirit.

- Cf. Isaiah 11:1-2 wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, fear of the Lord = the character of the 2nd Adam = “the wind in the sails”

- n.b. Aquinas maps the Gifts & Virtues to corresponding Beatitudes and to “Our Father...”!

**Fruits: Actions, perfections** (complete character) that are the refulgent goodness in our active love = sweet savor of the saints

* Cf. Galatians 5:22-23 as listed in Vulgate (Latin) translation
* “charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness (forebearance), gentleness, faithfulness, self-control, [generosity, modesty, chastity]”

• “The virtuous man is he who *freely* practices the good.” CCC 1804

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“Lord Jesus, as God’s Spirit came down and rested upon you, may the same Spirit rest upon us, bestowing his sevenfold gifts. First, grant us the gift of ***understanding***, by which your precepts may enlighten our minds. Second, grant us ***counsel***, by which we may follow in your footsteps on the path of righteousness. Third, grant us ***courage***, by which we may ward off the Enemy’s attacks. Fourth, grant us ***knowledge***, by which we can distinguish good from evil. Fifth, grant us ***piety***, by which we may acquire compassionate hearts. Sixth, grant us ***fear***, by which we may draw back from evil and submit to what is good. Seventh, grant us ***wisdom***, that we may taste fully the life-giving sweetness of your love.” -- Bonaventure (1217-1274)