

The Basics of Catholic Morality

Student Preparation

- Students were asked to read the Introduction to Part 3, *We Love: Our Life in Christ* (pages 192–193) and Chapter 8: *The Basics of Catholic Morality* (pages 194–213) in preparation for this session.

Warm-up (10–15 minutes)

- Write the word “Love” on the board. Have numerous pieces of chalk available. Ask all the students to come to the board and write either a song title or some song lyrics that contain the word “love.” Have everyone take their seats; then, pointing to the offerings on the board, call on the students to read them aloud one at a time.
- Go on to ask, “What is love?” Accept all of the students’ suggestions. If a student offers “God is love,” have him or her come forward and write it on the board. If no one mentions “God is love,” mention it yourself and write it on the board.
- Tell the teens that we don’t learn what love is by falling in love with someone and then predicating love of God. Just the opposite. Explain that only those who know God know love. And how do we know God? By God’s self-disclosure in Jesus. Remind the teens that the New Testament is a love story, and the love that gives it fire is the affection of the Son for the Father. We name that divine devotion the Holy Spirit.
- Have the teens open their texts to page 193. Call on a volunteer to read aloud the first sentence and then the passage from Matthew’s Gospel. Point out that Jesus calls us to learn to relate to God, and, in consequence, to relate to people. Love of God and love of neighbor, Jesus tells us, are never contending loves, but one, single animation. God is love and loves us first. Because of that love, we can love—our neighbor and ourselves.
- Write the phrase “A Moral Life Is a Life of Love” on the board. Tell the teens that in this, the third section of their text, they will examine what it means to live a moral life, a life of loving. Then, before moving on to the first part of the lesson, use candy hearts—or other bits of colored candy (M&Ms or Skittles)—and a roll of paper towels to play a game.
- Form two teams and assign each team two or more candy colors. If you have a large group, form more teams and assign each team one candy color. On the floor at one end of the room, unroll a 6-foot length of paper towels. Spread the candy over the entire length of paper towels. Have teams line up at the other end of the room. Explain to the teams that their mission is to capture all the candies whose colors are the same as the colors assigned to their team. Tell the students that when you say “go,” the first people on both teams hop on their left foot to the paper towels. They then kneel and use their teeth to pick up one piece of candy (team colors only and no hands allowed), stand, turn, and hop on their right foot back to their team. They show the candy in their mouth to the next person in line, who shouts out the color. If the color’s wrong, the person must go back and do it again. Then the next person hops to the paper towels and repeats the process. Each player can eat his or her candy after a person shouts out the candy color. The first team done wins.
- *Note:* When the teams are about half-way done collecting the candy, call them to “stop.” Tell them they can continue the game on two feet—that is, they no longer have to hop on one foot back and forth across the room. Afterward, ask which was the easier and more efficient way to play the game, on one foot or on two feet?

Part I: Lesson (30–40 minutes)

Text Reference: Modeling Christ; Humans Are Made in God’s Image (pages 194–201)

- Call attention to the text section “Humans Are Made in God’s Image” on page 197. Point out how God created us with the ability to know (intellect) and the power to love him and others (free will) so that we might share eternal happiness.
- Distribute copies of the activity sheet “In the Image of God.” Use the questions and scenarios on the sheet to discuss the topics related to the truths about human beings introduced on pages 197–198.
- After completing and discussing the activity sheet, go on to the text subsection “Humans and Society” (pages 198–201). Remind the students how they discovered that the Trinity is not simply a doctrine, but a reality—the reality, which is relation. The Trinitarian God is the only bearable God, the only God we can love and relate to. The Trinitarian God does not dwell somewhere in the stars, but in true and deepening relationship. The Father gives us Jesus, who, in turn, reveals the Father and releases the Spirit. We learn to relate to God, and, in consequence, we relate to other people through dialogue, service, and love in action.
- Write the phrase “**We are social beings**” on the board. Ask the teens to suggest some societies to which people belong. List them on the board. Go on to summarize the major principles the Church offers to help us live well in societies. If you feel it helpful, list these on the board.
 - **Subsidiarity** teaches us that a community of a higher order should not interfere in the activities a community of a lower order can achieve on its own. Ask:
What is an example of subsidiarity in a family? In a high school? In a nation like the United States?
 - **Rightful authority** comes from God; thus, those who exercise legitimate political authority deserve respect. Ask:
What can people your age do to make certain those in rightful authority exercise their authority with compassion?
 - **Common good** refers to social conditions that allow people to reach their full human potential and to realize their human dignity. Ask:
What are some rights that belong to human beings no matter their circumstances or behavior? (List on the board.)
 - **Social justice doctrine**—the teachings of the Church that speak to the ways societies function to promote the common good.
- Distribute copies of the activity sheet “Key Principles of Catholic Social Teaching” from the end of the lesson. Call on a volunteer to read aloud the opening quote from *The Church in the Modern World*. Go on to read through the list of principles with the students. Afterward, draw on the following to discuss the principles point by point:
 - 1) What are some things—actions, attitudes, words—that may happen throughout any day of high school that might lead to a growing disrespect for human life? If Jesus were to visit your school how would he find you doing with regard to the way those with physical or mental disabilities or those of a different race are being treated?
 - 2) Do you know anyone who seems unconnected, left out, or pushed out? What can you do to include that person? Suggest that the students consider planning and preparing shared activities with residents of a senior residence.
 - 3) Point out the list of rights the students created earlier when discussing the common good. Invite them to add to the list if they wish. Also, encourage the students to check out and get involved with the work of Human Rights Watch (www.hrw.org), a human rights organization dedicated to protecting the human rights of all people around the world.
 - 4) Challenge the students to recognize where the in things—clothes, electronics, etc.—come from. Ask: “Do you know how much money the people who make your shoes or clothes or iPod are paid for their labor? Is it a just wage?” Have the students research the answers.
 - 5) List the following references to the book of Psalms on the board: 9:18; 12:5; 22:26; 35:10; 72:12; 113:7; 140:12. Call on different students to look up and read each one aloud. Afterward, ask “What are some realistic, yet

challenging ways our class can reach out to the poor?" Choose one of the students' suggestions to work on as a group. Finally, read aloud the following quote from Peter Maurin, co-founder (with Dorothy Day) of the Catholic Worker movement: "What we give to the poor for Christ's sake is what we carry with us when we die." Challenge the teens to consider what Maurin's words might mean for living a moral life.

- 6) Ask: "What programs are you aware of that reach out in solidarity to help our brothers and sisters around the globe?" (Some examples include, The Heifer Project, Free the Children, and Catholic Relief Services' Global Solidarity Partnership. Challenge the students to explore these avenues to solidarity on the Internet and to get involved.)
 - 7) Read the following quote from Chief Seattle to the class: "This we know. All things are connected. Whatever befalls Earth befalls the children of Earth. We do not weave the web of life; we are merely strands of it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves." Then, ask: What do you do to care for Earth? (Tell the students to check out the website of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops at www.usccb.org/sdwp/ejp/ for some great ideas on how families, parishes, and communities can take care of the environment.)
- Call attention to the quote at the bottom of the activity sheet "Key Principles of Catholic Social Teaching." Point out how Pope John XXIII stressed that *love* is the engine driving Catholic social action.
 - Remind the teens of their opening activity. Explain that just as it was easier to accomplish their "mission" on two feet rather than on one, so, too, is Catholic Social Ministry better accomplished on "two feet."
 - Distribute copies of the activity sheet "Catholic Social Ministry—Standing on TWO Feet." Go over the material with the teens, making sure they understand the *difference* between the "Foot of Charity" and the "Foot of Justice" as well as the *necessity* of both for following in the path of Jesus Christ. For example: While we collect supplies for a local homeless shelter, we *simultaneously* work for affordable housing in our community.

Break/Writing Exercise (10 minutes)

- Join the students in a break with refreshments.
- Invite the students to journal responses to one or more of the following questions (list on the board):
 - What work for justice seems too impossible even to begin?
 - How does seeking the human rights of others change the seekers?
 - How can prayer keep us from losing heart and giving up on justice?
 - Who in our society persists in working for justice?

Part 2: Lesson (30–40 minutes)

Text Reference: Conscience and Moral Decisions; Virtues and Other Helps to Live a Moral Life; Sin, Justification, and Grace (pages 202–213)

- Call attention to the definition of conscience from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* on page 202. Then ask:
 - What factors have gone into shaping your conscience?
 - How might your conscience be different from someone who grew up in a society where, for example, women and children had no legal rights?
 - What outside influences had a positive—or negative—influence on forming your conscience?
- Have the students read aloud the final paragraph on page 202. Suggest that the students highlight or underline this entire paragraph.
- Draw attention to the "**sources of morality**" definition in the margin on page 203. Call on a student to read the text aloud. Make sure that the students understand that the goodness of an act is dependent on: *what* we do; *why* we do it; and the *circumstances* of what we do.
- Divide the class into three small groups. Give each group a copy of the activity sheet "3 Dilemmas." Assign each group to one of the dilemmas. Explain that they are to read the dilemma, discern and discuss its *what*, *why*, and *circumstances*, and then suggest how the main person in the dilemma can make a sound moral decision.

- Give the groups time to discuss, then have them present the results, either through a role play or simply by explaining the decision they arrived at. After each group has made its presentation, ask whether a change in motive or circumstances would have changed their decision.
- Drill students on the theological virtues. Ask:
 - Which theological virtue enables us to trust that God will act on our behalf and makes us hunger for heaven? (Hope)
 - Which theological virtue helps us live up to Jesus' great commandment—love God and love neighbor as self? (Charity)
 - Which theological virtue enables us to believe in God, Jesus, and the Gospel? (Faith)
- Point out the first discussion question on page 210 and ask the students to respond to it. (Answer: Charity. Faith will be unnecessary, because we will be able to see God face-to-face; hope will be unnecessary, because we will be living in fulfillment of God's promises to us.)
- Have the students look at the three expressions of moral law as outlined on page 207. Briefly describe each expression. Write on the board if you wish:
 - **Natural Law** is a moral sense of right and wrong that God has implanted in us. We can discover natural law through our own human reason.
 - **Revealed Law** includes the Law of the Old Testament and the New Law of Love given by Jesus.
 - **Civil and Church Laws:** civil laws apply natural law to societies; Church laws are minimum requirements for living as members of the Body of Christ.
- Remind the students how, in Chapter 5, they discovered that all sin is *separation*—a turning away from God. Remind them, too, that there is not much *we* can do about sin. That's why Jesus tells us, "Without me, you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Sin is too large, too lethal a poison for us. Only God can destroy sin in us. Explain that we call this divine mercy *justification*—the grace of the Holy Spirit that wipes away sin through faith in Jesus and Baptism. If you wish, write that definition on the board.
- Write the word "**Grace**" on the board. Explain the meaning of grace by having the teens recall the first verse of the song "Amazing Grace": *Amazing grace, how sweet the sound / that saved a wretch like me. / I once was lost, but now I'm found; / was blind, but now I see.* Point out how the song reveals that grace is a *saving gift* that grants us *purpose and direction*, and *opens our eyes to new ways of living*. List the types of grace on the board and have the students define each one:
 - **Sanctifying Grace:** disposes us to live like God.
 - **Actual Grace:** enables us to turn from sin and follow Jesus.
 - **Sacramental Graces:** flow from particular sacraments.
 - **Charisms:** special gifts given to individuals to help the Church grow.
 - **Graces of State:** special help God grants to special ministers in the Church.
- Briefly discuss "Merit and Vocation to Holiness" (pages 210–211). Emphasize that no one "earns" salvation. It is pure gift. However, we can "merit" salvation. Use the comparison below to help the teens see the difference between "earn" and "merit":
 - A wealthy woman hires a gardener. Out of her generosity, she pays the gardener one hundred times as much as anyone else would pay. However, in order to receive these wages, the gardener has to work faithfully. We can't say that the gardener "earns" such a substantial salary. At the same time, if the gardener performs as the woman expects and requests, the gardener certainly "merits" it.
- Go on to point out to the teens that they are all called to holiness. Explain that holiness is wholeness or harmony—head, hands, and heart at work as one with no interior dislocation. The holy person is a person possessed—possessed by the same Spirit that animated Jesus. Remind the students that Jesus experienced first-hand the brokenness of life. He understood that burdens, pain, and suffering were part of every person's life and sometimes were overwhelming. So Jesus gave us reason to hope. He didn't offer to eradicate life's trials and burdens. Rather, he invited us to switch our burden for a gentler, more hope-filled one—his own cross, which leads to life forever with God.

Prayer Experience (10 minutes)

- Gather the students around the Paschal (Easter) Candle. Light the candle. Observe a few moments of silence.
- Ask one of the students to read Micah 6:8
- Lead the teens in St. Francis of Assisi's Prayer for Peace in the "Prayer Reflection" on page 213.

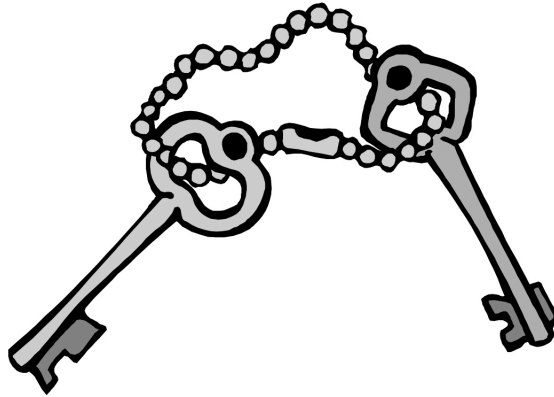
Conclusion (5 minutes)

- Draw the teens' attention to "Applying What You Have Learned" on page 213. Direct them to complete number 3 and to be ready to share their findings at their next meeting together.
- Have the students read Chapter 9: Christian Moral Life: The Beatitudes and the Ten Commandments (pages 214–241) in preparation for their next session.

In the Image of God

- * *We have dignity and worth.* How would this principle shape our response to the following?
Many prison inmates don't have high school diplomas; some cannot read or write. The state legislature decides to eliminate educational services in the state's prisons.
- * *We can think.* Is there anything "off" about the hitter's thinking in this humorous situation?
After the high school fast-pitch softball game, the winning team's big right-handed hitter headed for home. Before she left the field, however, a policeman approached and asked, "Did you hit a homer about twenty minutes ago?"
"Yes," the hitter responded.
"Did you happen to pull the ball so that it went over the left field fence?"
"Yes, I did. How did you know?" the hitter asked.
"Well," said the policeman very seriously, "your ball flew out onto the highway and smashed through a driver's windshield. The car went out of control, crashing into five other cars and a fire truck. The fire truck couldn't make it to a fire across town, and the building burned down. So, what are you going to do about it?"
The hitter thought it over carefully then responded, "I think I'll close my stance a little bit, choke up on the bat, and lay off of pitches that are low and inside."
- * *We possess freedom.* Is the teen in the following scenario free to make his own choice, or does pressure from his friends take away that freedom?
Fifteen-year-old Larry goes to a weekend party. Liquor is being served and all his friends are drinking. They begin making fun of him because he refuses to drink with them. At last, fearing his friends will shut him out, Larry accepts a beer.
- * *We are responsible.* Assess responsibility in the following situation.
A student asks her friend who works in a movie theater to let her sneak in. The friend gets caught. His boss decides to make an example of him and fires him.
- * *We are wounded by sin.* How do the sins of others affect the boy in the following scenario?
A third-grader attends school in large city. The textbooks are outdated, there is a broken window and leaky roof in his classroom, and fights break out in the cafeteria almost daily. He lives in a crowded apartment and shares a bedroom with two older brothers. He is reading at a first grade level.
- * *We are children of God and friends of the Lord Jesus.* Is anyone acting like a child of God and friend of Jesus in the following comical situation?
Mom was preparing pancakes for her two sons, Steve, twelve, and Sam, ten. The boys began to argue over who would get the first pancake. Mom saw the opportunity for a moral lesson. "If Jesus were sitting here, he would say, 'Let my brother have the first pancake. I can wait.'" Quick as a wink, Steve stabbed the pancake with his fork. "I'll take the pancake," he said, "and let Sam be Jesus."

☀ Key Principles of Catholic Social Teaching



The joys and hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the followers of Christ.

* *The Church in the Modern World* #1

- 1) The human person is sacred, being created in God's image and equal in God's eyes.
- 2) The human person is social, made to flourish in relationships—family, friends, community.
- 3) Every human person has a basic right to life and what makes life possible, such as food, water, shelter, education, health care, work. Every person has a corresponding duty to promote and protect these rights for others.
- 4) Work expresses our dignity as human persons. Through work we partner with God in creation. Workers have rights to fair wages and unions.
- 5) Catholics recognize a special obligation to the poor and vulnerable in our society—a preferential option for lifting up the poor.
- 6) The principle of solidarity calls Catholics to be our brothers' and sisters' keepers, to work for world peace and global development.
- 7) Creation is for the good of all. We have an obligation to respect and care for Earth.

It is not enough merely to formulate a social doctrine. It must be translated into reality. And this is particularly true of the Church's social doctrine, the light of which is Truth, Justice its objective, and Love its driving force.

* *Mater et Magistra (Mother and Teacher)* #226, Pope John XXIII, 1961

Catholic Social Ministry— Standing on TWO Feet

Catholic social ministry has two feet. One is called charity, the other justice. Living morally means using both feet.

The Foot of Charity = Social Service

- * private, individual acts
- * responds to immediate needs
- * provides direct service (food, clothing, shelter)
- * requires repeated actions
- * directed at the effects of injustice (symptoms)
- * examples: food shelves, homeless shelters, clothing drives



The Foot of Justice = Social Change

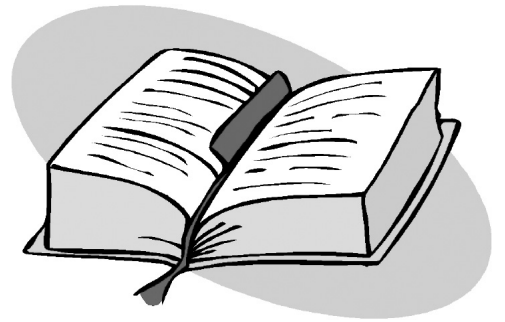
- * public, collective actions
- * responds to long-term needs
- * promotes social change in institutions
- * resolves structural injustice
- * directed at the root causes of injustice (search for cure)
- * examples: changing a corporate policy, church-based community organizing, legislative advocacy

☀ 3 Dilemmas



While driving on a congested freeway, Jerry—a junior in high school—gets a text message from his mom that reads: “Need you! Come home quick!” Jerry is not sure what the message entails, so he tries calling home, but he can’t get through. Jerry is feeling nervous and somewhat panicky. He wonders if he should drive onto the shoulder of the highway and put the pedal to the metal.

Sharon, a high school sophomore, feels that she needs a part-time job in the worst way. Her dad is laid off from work temporarily and can no longer afford to give her any sort of allowance. There’s a job opening at a local bookstore that pays well and fits her schedule perfectly. However, the job listing states, “Previous retail experience a must!” Sharon has never held a job of any kind. She wants the job and knows she can do it, no sweat. Sharon is considering whether to add a little fiction to her job application.



Coach Fridley finds marijuana in Randy’s locker and kicks him off the high school hockey team that is headed for state. Randy, a senior—and, if truth be told, a real jerk—vehemently denies that the marijuana is his, but lots of kids know that Randy has used marijuana in the past and gotten away with it. Chad, however, knows that the marijuana really belongs to Alex, whose locker is next to Randy’s. Alex is the star player on the team, and a really nice guy. Chad is trying to figure out what to do.