**Symbolon: The Catholic Faith Explained**

**Part 2: Living the Faith**

Episode 6: A Catholic Moral Vision

**Part 1**

Many think that Christian morality is about the things that you can not do. The renaissance artist Raphael depicted the goodness of moral life. He did not focus on the rules and commandments. He focused on the virtues. The virtues that we need to live a happy life.

* Raphael depicts morality in his paintings as the art of living life well. To live a good life, we need to know what the good is. We need the virtue of prudence.
* In addition to prudence we also need self-control and courage. We need both of these virtues so that we are not controlled by the pleasures of this world or by the fear of making sacrifices.
* The virtues are the skills we need to live life with excellence.

Charles Dickens; David Copperfield

***“Will you be the hero of your own life; these pages must show.”***

* We should view our lives as a story. Our lives are going in a certain direction. Everyday we make choices drawing us closer to God or further away from Him.

**Moral Relativism**

* A person can decide for himself what is right and wrong. A person can decide for himself what is good and evil. Moral Relativism is focused on self.
* God has a plan for our lives. His plan leads us to a heroic life. We must make a fundamental decision. Will we follow God’s plan for our life, or will we follow our own plan?

*Chris Stefanick*

* Catholic understanding of morality is that we follow the God who made us so that we can be set free and be who we were made to be.
* For anything to function properly it must be used according to its design. God made us. Catholic morality is following the makers plan for our own lives.
* Moral relativism proclaims that we do not need to follow God’s plan in our life, but we can follow our own. We can make up our own morality and ethics.
* There is no objective truth on how we are supposed to live. Everyone has their own truth.
* We can not judge another person. It is only for God to judge another person. Only God knows the circumstances of that person’s life. We have a responsibility to judge an immoral action
* Moral Relativism’s understanding of tolerance is to never disagree. The true definition of tolerance is to first disagree in order to begin to tolerate somebody.
* We are to be firm with objective truth while being tolerant. Our mandate from Jesus is to love and serve everyone.
* We can and should love others who disagree with us to the point that we want to share the truth about life and morality so that they can be happy.
* Just as a parent gives their children rules to keep them healthy and safe God has given us rules so that we can be free from sin; so that we can be health and safe.

**Part 2**

***Why did God give moral laws? Why does the Catholic Church proclaim moral teachings? Is the point of moral law and moral teachings to control us, to restrict us, to keep us from having fun?***

* God’s moral law flows from His fatherly heart. God loves us and he wants us to be happy.
* God’s law is there for our happiness. When we obey moral law and teaching, we are going to be happy. When we don’t obey morals law and teachings, we will hurt others and ourselves.

*Themes*

1. ***The Moral Law*** – The Bible describes God’s law as a light for our path. The Church’s moral teaching is a pathway to happiness and human fulfillment.
2. ***Freedom & Virtue*** – True freedom is the ability to live life with excellence. When we do what we want with no consideration of moral law we become enslaved to sin. Virtue is the habitual disposition to do the good. The practice of virtue makes us free to love.
3. ***What makes a choice morally good?*** There are three elements to a good moral act.
4. Mortal & Venial Sin – What is the difference between mortal and venial sins. How do these sins effect our relationship with God?
5. Conscience – What is conscience? We need to properly form our conscience and to follow our conscience.

Morality is not so much about rules as it is about happiness. God made us to share in His own happiness.

* God gives us the moral law in order that we can learn to live well; to lead us to happiness.
* In our culture we are trained to think that law means limitations. Our culture believes that moral law is limiting our happiness.

With any product the manufacturer will have an owner’s manual that will contain “rules” and “laws” for the maintenance of the product. The manufacturer designed the product and they know the “rules” and “laws” for properly maintaining the product.

* God designed us. He gives us moral laws not to limit our freedom but that we may come to know our nature and follow it to its fullness so that we can be happy. Our nature is found in that we were made in the “image and likeness” of God.
* It is not enough to know God’s Law. We need virtue to be able to perform the Law; to do what is right.
* ***Virtue is the habitual and firm disposition to do the good.*** *CCC 1803*

***Where do we find authentic human freedom? What empowers us to be free? Many people believe that freedom is constituted by choice.***

* Choice is an important part of freedom, but we do not have true freedom with choice alone. To have true freedom we need to have choice and achievement (skills).
* If I value something and want to choose it that does not mean I can do it. To do it requires skill.
* In the Catholic tradition we call these skills virtues. The Latin word for virtue is strength. I must have the skill and strength to do something.
* The opposite of virtue is vice. Vice means a weakness of will. Our will is so weak that we are not able to say “no” to those things that are bad for us.
* ***In the Catholic tradition freedom is not just about choice and values. It is also an achievement that comes from skills that we call virtues that gives us the strength to attain authentic human freedom.***
* The Christian moral life involves law, virtue and choice.

**There are three elements of choice.**

1. Intention – Why are we doing it?
2. Circumstances – How are we doing it? Why are we doing it? When are we doing it? Where are we doing it?
3. The Object – The act itself; What are we choosing?

For a moral choice to be good all these elements must be good. The statement *“The ends justifies the means”* is commonly used. The belief is that if our intention is good or if the consequences was good than it does not matter if the circumstances of the object was immoral. We may never to do evil to achieve a good end.

***Where does the disorder of sin reside? Does the disorder of sin exist primarily out there in the world through the consequences that I bring about or does the disorder of sin reside principally within my own heart?***

* When I do evil to achieve a good end, I am not the same. I am changed. I become what I choose.
* When we do something evil to achieve a good end the disorder of sin resides in my own heart and changes me. In the end we become what we choose.
* When we make a bad moral choice or when something in our choice is wrong this is sin. It contradicts God’s law and therefore contradicts what is good for us.

***Sin*** – *“An utterance, a deed or a desire contrary to the eternal law.” CCC 1849*

There are two kinds of sin.

* Mortal Sin – I a serious sin. Cuts us off from our relationship with God; that life of grace in our soul. For a sin to be a mortal sin it must:

1. Be a grave manner
2. We know that it is wrong.
3. We consent to engage in that act.

* Venial Sin – We made a choice that is wrong, but it is still a lesser matter.

***“All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin which is not mortal.”*** 1 John 5:17

* We must take venial sins seriously. When we continue to commit venial sins and do not take them seriously or allow them to become more frequent, they can dispose us to committing mortal sins.

***Conscience*** – reflects God’s law imprinted into our very souls which is fundamentally to do good and avoid evil. It takes that basic law and applies it in particular circumstances in our lives. When we see something that is wrong it tells us to avoid that thing. When we see something that we should do it tells us to do it.

* We must form our conscience. Our conscience can be distorted when we believe that something that it wrong is right for us.
* Our conscience can also be formed and strengthened when we come to know Christ and learn his revealed law. Our knowledge of Christ enables us to understand what is good for us to do and what should be avoided.
* It is easy to rationalize or justify something that is wrong as being good. The culture of Moral Relativism tells us that whatever we decide is true is true.
* God has given us the Scripture and the Church to interpret the Scripture to give us a reliable guide to understand what is right and what is wrong. Our conscience is to be well formed through reading Scripture and the teaching of the Church.
* If we have a badly formed conscience we are acting according to our conscience that is in error.