



7th Grade: Lesson 1: Introduction to Morality

Introduction:



From the time we are born, we are taught how we should and should not act. Among the many reasons for this practice, the most important one is to make sure that we fulfill our purpose, or end, in life: to be with God in the beatific vision. If an act gets us closer to the beatific vision, it is good and we should do it. If it pulls us away from God, then we should avoid it. Organizing our acts in this way is called morality. In this lesson we will introduce the concept of morality and discuss its importance.

Take a few moments to meditate on the saint whom we honor today: [Click Here](#).



Opening Prayer:



Devout prayer is a moral act without equal. The highest form of Catholic prayer is the Liturgy, but the Church has a treasury of prayers for the faithful to say alone or with others. These prayers, when prayed sincerely, invite grace and a closer union to Christ into our lives. Certain prayers also carry a specific temporal benefit. This benefit is called an indulgence.

An **indulgence** is the remission of the temporal punishment that remains for sins that have already been forgiven. An indulgence may be partial or plenary. **Partial indulgences** remit some of the temporal punishment due to forgiven sins. **Plenary indulgences** remit all of the temporal punishment, as long as the specific conditions attached to it are met. The conditions are sacramental confession, receiving the Holy Eucharist, and praying for the intentions of the Holy Father.

The *Enchiridion of Indulges* explains the purpose and value of indulgences:

“To recall briefly the most important considerations, this salutary practice teaches us in the first place how it is ‘sad and bitter to have abandoned...the Lord God.’ Indeed the faithful when they acquire indulgences understand that by their own powers they could not remedy the harm they have done to themselves and to the entire community by their sin, and they are therefore stirred to a salutary humility. Furthermore, the use of indulgences shows us how closely we are united to each other in Christ, and how the supernatural life of each can benefit others so that these also



may be more easily and more closely united with the Father. Therefore the use of indulgences effectively influences charity in us and demonstrates that charity in an outstanding manner when we offer indulgences as assistance to our brothers who rest in Christ. Likewise, the religious practice of indulgences reawakens trust and hope in a full reconciliation with God the Father, but in such a way as will not justify and negligence nor in any way diminish the effort to acquire the dispositions required for full communion with God. To acquire them, it is indeed required on the one hand that prescribed works be performed, and on the other that the faithful have the necessary disposition, that is to say, that they love God, detest sin, place their trust in the merits of Christ and believe firmly in the great assistance they derive from the Communion of Saints.”

Visit, we beg you, O Lord (Visita, quaesumus, Domine)

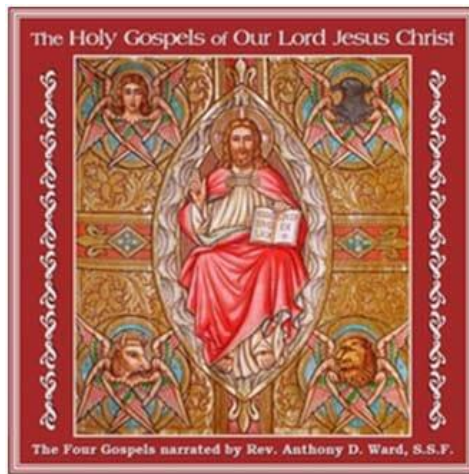
In English:

Visit, we beg you, O Lord, this dwelling, and drive from it all snares of the enemy: let your holy angels dwell herein, to keep us in peace; and let your blessings be always upon us. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

In Latin:

Visita, quaesumus, Domine, habitationem istam, et omnes insidias inimici ab ea longe repelle: Angeli tui sancti habitant in ea, qui nos in pace custodiant; et benediction tua sit super nos semper. Per Christum Dominum nostrum. Amen.

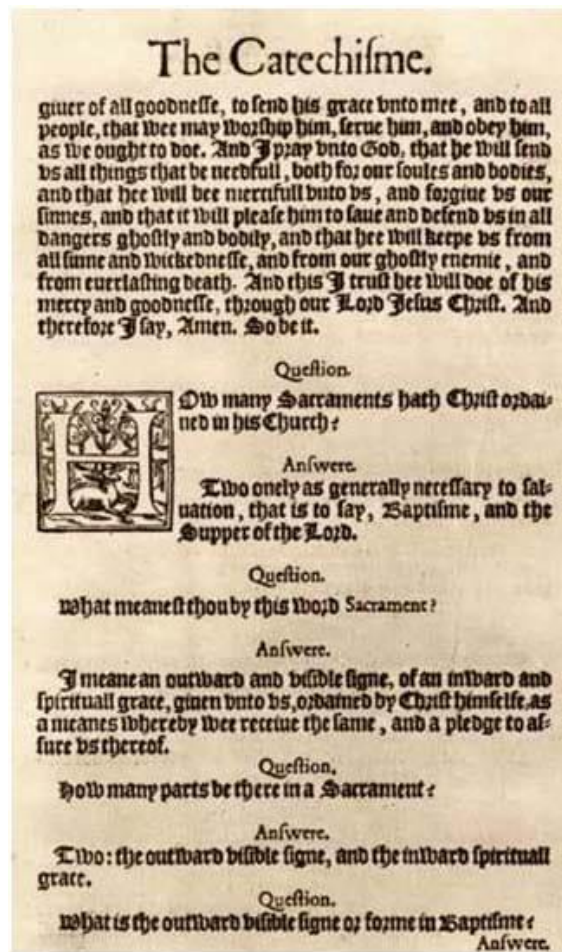
Scripture:



My child, if sinners entice you, do not consent. If they say, “Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood; let us wantonly ambush the innocent; like Sheol let us swallow them alive and whole, like those who go down to the Pit. We shall find all kinds of costly things; we shall fill our houses with booty. Throw in your lot among us; we will all have one purse” — my child, do not walk in their way, keep your foot from their paths; for their feet run to evil, and they hurry to shed blood. For in vain is the net baited while the bird is looking on; yet they lie in wait—to kill themselves! and set an ambush—for their own lives! Such is the end of all who are greedy for gain; it takes away the life of its possessors. **Proverbs 1:10-19**



Catechism References:



133. What is man?

Man is a creature composed of body and soul, and made to the image and likeness of God.

136. Is this likeness in the body or in the soul?

This likeness is chiefly in the soul.

137. How is the soul like to God?

The soul is like to God because it is a spirit that will never die, and has understanding and free will.

152. Of which must we take more care, our soul or our body?

We must take more care of our soul than of our body.



153. Why must we take more care of our soul than of our body?

We must take more care of our soul than of our body, because in losing our soul we lose God and everlasting happiness.

142. What does our "understanding" mean?

Our understanding means the gift of reason, by which man is distinguished from all other animals, and by which he is enabled to think and thus acquire knowledge and regulate his actions.

145. What is "Free Will"?

'Free Will' is that gift of God by which we are enabled to choose between one thing and another; and to do good or evil in spite of reward or punishment.

143. Can we learn all truths by our reason alone?

We can not learn all truths by our reason alone, for some truths are beyond the power of our reason and must be taught to us by God.

128. In what respect are all men equal?

All men are equal in whatever is necessary for their nature and end. They are all composed of a body and soul; they are all created to the image and likeness of God; they are all gifted with understanding and free will; and they have all been created for the same end -- God.

129. Do not men differ in many things?

Men differ in many things, such as learning, wealth, power, etc.; but these things belong to the world and not man's nature. He came into this world without them and he will leave it without them. Only the consequences of good or evil done in this world will accompany men to the next.

346. What was the moral condition of the world just before the coming of Our Lord?

Just before the coming of Our Lord the moral condition of the world was very bad. Idolatry, injustice, cruelty, immorality and horrid vices were common almost everywhere.

Lesson:

What is the aim our existence?

This is the classic philosophical question. Centuries of brilliant thinkers pondered this question and came up with various answers. The Greek philosopher **Aristotle's** answer comes as close to the Truth as a pagan can probably get. He said that the aim of our existence is to *be happy*. There is no higher achievement for man than happiness, and happiness is found through the practice of **virtue**, or good habits. Developing a virtuous, or moral, character takes a lifetime but it is possible to achieve because it is in our nature. Aristotle's development of virtues and the



attainment of happiness is the basis of his work, *Nicomachean Ethics*. This work influenced Catholic scholars, especially Saint Thomas Aquinas.

The early Church Fathers recognized God's inspiration throughout Greek philosophy, and took it as confirmation of the words of Scripture: "then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life" (Acts 11:18). Christ opened heaven for every person, because every person was created for one purpose, or **end**: to be with God in the beatific vision. This makes every person who has, is, and will ever live joined in one purpose and given the same means to reach their end.



St. Paul in Prison
by Rembrandt (1627)

How can we be sure that all people have the same end and the same means to reach that end? Because, as it says in Genesis 1:26, we are made in His image and according to His likeness. This is called the ***imago Dei***, and it is the first principle that binds all people together and to God. We are made to reflect God while on Earth and to be reunited with Him for eternity. This is what the Church identifies as the ultimate happiness that Aristotle spoke of. And as Aristotle discusses the importance of virtue in reaching happiness, we know that living a virtuous life is an important part of living as authentic Catholics.



Virtues are habits that move us closer to true happiness and our end. To help us know what acts are considered virtuous, each human act is evaluated. Is it good and move us closer to God? Or is it bad and move us away from God? Is the act always bad? Is it good but can turn bad in some way? Answering these questions is what we know as **morality**.

Morality is part of our human nature. God made us to be moral so that we could properly reflect Him through our body and soul working together. Morality is the compass that points us toward salvation or damnation. Think about that for a moment. How closely we follow our God-given morals influences our eternal outcome. That's how important morality is!

Christ Himself emphasizes the importance of morality. When Adam committed Original Sin, man's moral compass broke. To fix us, to carry out the work of our salvation, Christ took on our human nature. By doing this, He healed what was broken, and showed us how to be perfectly human. This is why, when we say we "follow Christ," we adhere not only to His teachings, but also to *the way He lived His life!*

Spotlight on the Saints: Saint Paul

Probably no one is more famous for changing his moral compass than **Saint Paul**. From Catholic.org:

Paul was likely born between the years of 5 BC and 5 AD. His was a devout Jewish family in the city of Tarsus—one of the largest trade centers on the Mediterranean coast. It had been in existence several hundred years prior to his birth. It was renowned for its university, one in which students could receive a superior education. During the time of Alexander the Great, who died in 323 BC, Tarsus was the most influential city in Asia Minor.

In his letters, Paul reflected heavily from his knowledge of Stoic philosophy, using Stoic terms and metaphors to assist his new Gentile converts in their understanding of the revealed word of God.

He would also rely heavily on the training he received concerning the law and the prophets, utilizing this knowledge to convince his Jewish countrymen of the unity of past Old Testament prophecy and covenants with the fulfilling of these in Jesus Christ. His wide spectrum of experiences and education gave the "Apostle to the Gentiles" the tools which he later would use to effectively spread the Gospel and to establish the church solidly in many parts of the Roman Empire.

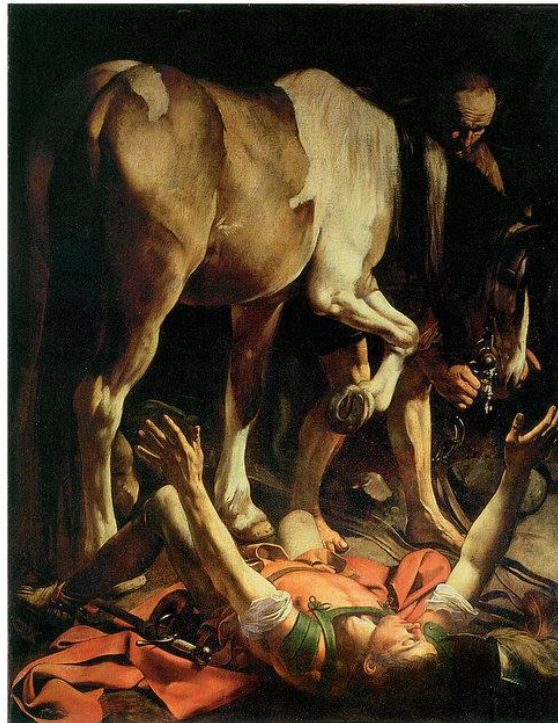
Paul referred to himself as being "of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee."

The Bible reveals very little about Paul's family. Paul's nephew, his sister's son, is mentioned in Acts 23:16. Acts also quotes Paul indirectly referring to his father by saying he, Paul, was "a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee." Paul refers to his mother in Romans 16:13 as among those at Rome. In Romans 16:7 he states that his relatives, Andronicus and Junia, were Christians before he was and were prominent among the apostles.



The family had a history of religious piety. Apparently the family lineage had been very attached to Pharisaic traditions and observances for generations. Young Saul learned how to make the mohair with which tents were made. Later as a Christian missionary, that trade became a means of support for him, one that he could practice anywhere. It also was to become an initial connection with Priscilla and Aquila with whom he would partner in tentmaking and later become very important teammates as fellow missionaries.

While he was still fairly young, he was sent to Jerusalem to receive his education at the school of Gamaliel, one of the most noted rabbis in history. The Hillel school was noted for giving its students a balanced education, likely giving Paul broad exposure to classical literature, philosophy, and ethics. Some of his family may have resided in Jerusalem since later the son of one of his sisters saved his life there. Nothing more is known of his background until he takes an active part in the martyrdom of Stephen. Paul confesses that "beyond measure" he persecuted the church of God prior to his conversion. Although we know from his biography and from Acts that Paul could speak Hebrew, modern scholarship suggests that Koine Greek was his first language.



*Conversion on the Way to Damascus
by Caravaggio (1601)*

Paul's conversion can be dated to 31 – 36 by his reference to it in one of his letters. In Galatians 1:16 Paul writes that God "was pleased to reveal his son to me." In 1 Corinthians 15:8, as he lists the order in which Jesus appeared to his disciples after his resurrection, Paul writes, "last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also."



According to the account in Acts, Saul's conversion took place in the city Damascus three days following his vision of the resurrected Jesus on the road to Damascus. The account says that "he [Saul] fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Saul replied, "Who art thou, Lord?" And the Lord said, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: [it is] hard for thee to kick against the pricks." According to the Biblical account, he was blinded for three days and had to be led into Damascus by the hand. During these three days, Saul took no food or water and spent his time in prayer to God. It was not until the arrival of Ananias of Damascus that Saul regained his sight, and only when Saul obeyed the command of Ananias to be baptized did he cease his praying and were his sins washed away. According to some scholars "Paul himself never recounts the story of being blinded by the sight of Jesus" but only Luke in Acts of the Apostles.

The author of the Acts arranges Paul's travels into three separate journeys. The first journey, led initially by Barnabas, takes Paul from Antioch to Cyprus then southern Asia Minor (Anatolia), and back to Antioch. In Cyprus, Paul rebukes and blinds Elymas the magician who was criticizing their teachings. From this point on, Paul is described as the leader of the group.

They sail to Perga in Pamphylia. John Mark leaves them and returns to Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas go on to Pisidian Antioch. On Sabbath they go to the synagogue. The leaders invite them to speak. Paul reviews Israelite history from life in Egypt to King David. He introduces Jesus as a descendant of David brought to Israel by God. He said that his team came to town to bring the message of salvation. He recounts the story of Jesus' death and resurrection. He quotes from the Septuagint to assert that Jesus was the promised Christos who brought them forgiveness for their sins. Both the Jews and the "God-fearing" Gentiles invited them to talk more next Sabbath. At that time almost the whole city gathered. This upset some influential Jews who spoke against them. Paul used the occasion to announce a change in his mission which from then on would be to the Gentiles.

In Philippi, Paul cast a spirit of divination out of a servant girl, whose masters were then unhappy about the loss of income her soothsaying provided. (Acts 16:16-24) They turned the city against the missionaries, and Paul and Silas were put in jail. After a miraculous earthquake, the gates of the prison fell apart and Paul and Silas could have escaped but remained; this event led to the conversion of the jailor. (Acts 16:25-40) They continued traveling, going by Berea and then to Athens where Paul preached to the Jews and God-fearing Greeks in the synagogue and to the Greek intellectuals in the Areopagus.

Around 50 – 52, Paul spent 18 months in Corinth. The reference in Acts to Proconsul Gallio helps ascertain this date (cf. Gallio inscription). In Corinth, Paul met Priscilla and Aquila who became faithful believers and helped Paul through his other missionary journeys. The couple followed Paul and his companions to Ephesus, and stayed there to start one of the strongest and most faithful churches at that time. In 52, the missionaries sailed to Caesarea to greet the Church there and then traveled north to Antioch where they stayed for about a year before leaving again on their third missionary journey.



According to the Book of Acts, Paul began his third missionary journey by travelling all around the region of Galatia and Phrygia to strengthen, teach and rebuke the believers. Paul then traveled to Ephesus, an important center of early Christianity, and stayed there for almost three years. He is claimed to have performed numerous miracles, healing people and casting out demons, and he apparently organized missionary activity in other regions. Paul left Ephesus after an attack from a local silversmith resulted in a pro-Artemis riot involving most of the city. During his stay in Ephesus, Paul wrote four letters to the church in Corinth.

Paul and his companions visited other cities on their way back to Jerusalem such as Philippi, Troas, Miletus, Rhodes, and Tyre. Paul finished his trip with a stop in Caesarea where he and his companions stayed with Philip the Evangelist before finally arriving at Jerusalem.

After Paul's arrival in Jerusalem at the end of his third missionary journey, he became involved in a serious conflict with some "Asian Jews" (most likely from Roman Asia). The conflict eventually led to Paul's arrest and imprisonment in Caesarea for two years. Finally, Paul and his companions sailed for Rome where Paul was to stand trial for his alleged crimes. Acts states that Paul preached in Rome for two years from his rented home while awaiting trial.

Paul was warned by James and the elders that he was gaining a reputation for being against the Law, saying "they have been told about you that you teach all the Jews living among the gentiles to forsake Moses, and that you tell them not to circumcise their children or observe the customs."

Paul underwent a purification ritual in order to give the Jews no grounds to bring accusations against him for not following their law. Paul caused a stir when he appeared at the Temple, and he escaped being killed by the crowd by voluntarily being taken into Roman custody. When a plot to kill Paul on his way to an appearance before the Jews was discovered, he was transported by night to Caesarea Maritima. He was held as a prisoner there for two years, until a new governor reopened his case in 59. When the governor suggested that he be sent back to Jerusalem for further trial, Paul exercised his right as a Roman citizen to "appeal unto Caesar."

Christian tradition holds that Paul was beheaded in Rome during the reign of Nero around the mid-60s at Tre Fontane Abbey.

Lesson Summary

Words to Remember:

Aristotle
Virtue
End
Imago Dei
Morality
Saint Paul



In this lesson we learned that:

Aristotle taught that man's highest aim is happiness through the practice of virtue.

The ultimate happiness is union with God in the beatific vision.

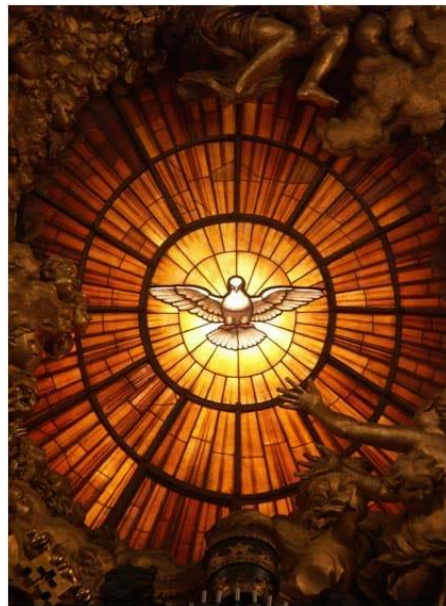
Man is made in the imago Dei.

To reflect the imago Dei and reach our end, man must conform his thoughts and actions in proper imitation of God.

Christ shows us how to imitate God.

Morality helps us determine whether our acts move us closer to God or farther from Him.

Activity:



St. Peter's Basilica in Rome

Pretend that a stranger is visiting you, and he or she knows nothing about God. This stranger follows you around all day, watching everything you say and do. After following you all day, the stranger sits down and writes a description of God based on your actions. Reflect on your day and write down the qualities you think the stranger would use to describe God based on your actions.

How many of these qualities accurately describe God? How many don't? To start a good discussion, have your family do this exercise too.

And lastly, you need to understand the foundation to a real spiritual life is detachment. What is detachment? How can we practice it? Spend some time this week listening to this sermon on detachment. Pray to Our Lord and Our Lady for the graces you need to be holy.



Closing Prayer:



In the 5th century AD, a church was erected over a pagan temple in Latium and named “Saint Mary of Good Counsel.” Falling into disrepair and near ruin by 1356, a group of Augustinians took to restoring the church. In 1467 the church was still a mess, but during construction, a previously covered-up wall with a beautiful fresco of the Madonna and Christ-child appeared. Taken as a sign of favor, the small section of the fresco with the Madonna and child was carefully preserved. No thicker than an eggshell, the picture survived natural and man-made disasters and is believed to be the source of many miraculous cures. Many popes have a special devotion to Our Mother of Good Counsel, so much so that this devotion is known as “Mary of the Popes.”

Make it part of your daily routine to pray the Holy Rosary. For now, choose one decade of your favorite mystery to pray. **To pray the online rosary:** [Click Here.](#)

A Prayer to Mary for a Good Mind:

O Mary, my Mother, I offer you my soul, my mind, and my heart. Make of me God's instrument. Give me a penetrating mind to discover, firm to judge, open to understand, free to serve the truth; an honest mind in telling what it sees rather than what it wants to see; a tolerant mind which does not dictate to other people, but which explain what it sees clearly; a mind infused by the light and the truth of your Son Jesus, patient in faith, while waiting for the vision of eternal life. Amen.