

Homily Guide  
Sunday, March 13, 2011  
Fr. James Flynn

## Well Formed Conscience

Conscience - is the ability to distinguish right from wrong.

Conscience is based on objective principles that are applied to everyday situations.

These objective principles are not based on feelings or social construct or voted on by people. They are objective, unchanging and universal. Truth is only true if it is true for everyone in every situation.

"Deep within his conscience man discovers a law which he has not laid upon himself but which he must obey. Its voice, ever calling him to love and to do what is good and to avoid evil, sounds in his heart at the right moment. . . . For man has in his heart a law inscribed by God. . . . His conscience is man's most secret core and his sanctuary. There he is alone with God whose voice echoes in his depths." (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 16)

In the early 5th century, St. Vincent of Lerins, writing under the pseudonym of Peregrinus, defines a "rule of faith" for determining what the faithful are to believe. He states that the Catholic faith is "that faith which has been believed everywhere, always, by all." This rule of faith is always exercised in union and fidelity to the Church and the hierarchy. St. Vincent maintains that "to continue sound and complete in the Catholic faith, we must, the Lord helping, fortify our own belief in two ways; first, by the authority of the Divine Law, and then, by the Tradition of the Catholic Church."

By Tradition, St Vincent means the transmission of the entirety of the Word of God, including Sacred Scripture. In fact the Church places the study of Scripture first in the formation of conscience (cf., *Catechism*, no. 1785). "Sacred Scripture is the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit" (*Dei Verbum*, no. 9).

Three types of Conscience that exist in every person:

- A Conscience constantly being well formed.
- A Conscience constantly being malformed.
- A Dead Conscience

We must constantly strive for a well formed conscience so that we can properly see our actions for what they are. Conscience is God's divine light showing us the way. A well formed conscience helps us to see things properly and fully. And if we don't see with the light of Christ we will stumble through the world doing sinful and foolish things.

"The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!" (Matthew 6:22 - 23)

When we have a well formed conscience we are bound to follow it. If we do something against our conscience then we commit a sin. For example: If your conscience is telling you to stop and help someone and you don't then you have committed a sin. Because we must always follow the will of God.

Don't confuse "Feelings" for "Conscience." There are many times I don't feel like doing something good or I feel like doing something bad. We can't do something that the Church teaches as a sin and then say, "Well, I was following my conscience." We don't evaluate the Church's teaching with our individual "conscience" (which is usually just our feelings), we change our conscience to match Church teachings. When I refer to the "Church's Teachings" I am referring to the body of teaching that resides in the Catholic Church. Not the individual whims and fancies of any particular Pope, Bishop or Priest. If you don't know what the Church teaches then read your Bible and Catechism and you will know.

