

Homily Notes
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Moral Decision Making

We all make moral decision each day that have effects on ourselves and others, but most people don't have a device they can use to make moral decisions.

Most people make decisions based on:

- Feelings
- Past Experience
- Influence of others - Authorities, friends, teachers, books, websites, etc.
- Addictions
- Foreseeable outcomes - I'll win/lose, grow/diminish, be happy/sad.

"What is Evil?"

First we must understand "What is evil?"

Most of us go around making decisions that are either good or evil and have an effect on our life and the lives of others without understanding what evil is.

What is the first thing you think about when I ask you to define "evil?"

St Thomas Aquinas: From the writings of St Thomas we see that evil can generally be understood as the absence or lacking of good, i.e, the absence of some trait that perfects or completes a thing's being.

- Using St Thomas' definition we see that evil is the absence of good, not a "thing" that actually exists,
 - i.e., a lie is the absence of truth. The lie does not exist in itself.
 - If I say, "I was at the library," but was really at the movies. I tried to make someone believe something that didn't exist (Me going to the movies never happened, therefore it didn't exist).
- Now we see that the goal is perfection. God is perfect, therefore he lacks in nothing and is complete in everything.
- In Catholic moral thought, every created thing is considered good in so far as it exists, and in so far as it fulfills the potential for which it was created.
- Using this definition of evil we must now strive for perfection and completeness.
 - You can't say, "Well, this is just the way God made me." God made us to do his will in every instance.

Moral evil - concerns the disordered nature or defect of a voluntary action (also known as a human act) that in some way fails to correspond to the will of God, i.e., I commit a moral evil when I do something that goes against God's will.

- Aquinas considered human actions to be evil to the degree that the choice fails to correspond to the agent's proper fulfillment, or to the degree that the action fails to properly respect another's inherent human dignity.
 - This is why the Church puts gossip under the commandment "Thou shall not kill." Because you are not respecting another human beings inherent human dignity.
- the more the act fails to correspond to the will of God or proper human fulfillment, the more evil it is. It follows that some evil acts are worse than others.

Aquinas also believed that human beings did not co-naturally desire evil. Rather, he thought that we only had the capacity to desire and to choose what is good--whether that good was real **or merely apparent** . Evil actions were merely the result of the agent having convinced himself that an evil action was actually good and then seeking this apparent good. Thus, Aquinas believed that "do good, avoid evil" was the self-evident first principle of practical reason.

- We would not do evil if we knew the outcome of it. We do evil because we **think** it will bring a good.
 - A lie will get me out of trouble.
 - Stealing will give me an object that will make me happy
 - Adultery will give me satisfaction
 - Abortion and birth control will free me to do what I want to do with my life/money.

However these things brought to there logical end do not bring a good. In every instance it is a sin and could lead to the loss of heaven. But we also lose in the temporal world:

- A lie will be found out and people will not trust me anymore.
- Stealing will not fill the void in my heart that caused me to steal in the first place.
- Adultery negatively effects almost every aspect of life and those around me and most especially those I love. It destroys trust, wealth, and stability.
- Abortion and birth control may free me to live the temporal life I want, but leads to selfishness and loneliness. When I die what do I want to be surrounded by, people who love me or my things?

In the coming weeks we will talk about how to make a moral decision

