

Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility

Adult Education and Small Faith Community Sharing Session B

Theme: Forming Consciences

Scripture Reading & Discussion Questions

A Reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans. . . (Romans 2:13-16)



For it is not those who hear the law who are just in the sight of God; rather, those who observe the law will be justified.

For when the Gentiles who do not have the law by nature observe the prescriptions of the law, they are a law for themselves even though they do not have the law.

They show that the demands of the law are written in their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even defend them on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge people's hidden works through Christ Jesus.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) What does Paul mean when he writes that although the Gentiles may not be familiar with Judaic law, “the demands of the law are written in their hearts”?
- 2) Name a time in which you had a difficult time deciding what was right in a situation. What helped you make your decision?
- 3) Why does Paul make a distinction between hearing the law and observing the law? How does this relate to you personally?
- 4) How does a person form the ability to choose between right and wrong? How does a person become equipped to make a responsible and faithful choice?

Faithful Citizenship Reading & Discussion Questions

Readings from Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: *A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States*:

The Church equips her members to address political and social questions by helping them to develop a well-formed conscience. Catholics have a serious and lifelong obligation to form their consciences in accord with human reason and the teaching of the Church. Conscience is not something that allows us to justify doing whatever we want, nor is it a mere “feeling” about what we should or should not do. Rather, conscience is the voice of God resounding in the human heart, revealing the truth to us and calling us to do what is good while shunning what is evil. Conscience always requires serious attempts to make sound moral judgments based on the truths of our faith. . . (no. 17).

The formation of conscience includes several elements. First, there is a desire to embrace goodness and truth. For Catholics this begins with a willingness and openness to seek the truth and what is right by studying Sacred Scripture and the teaching of the Church as contained in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. It is also important to examine the facts and background information about various choices. Finally, prayerful reflection is essential to discern the will of God. Catholics must also understand that if they fail to form their consciences they can make erroneous judgments (no. 18)

The Church fosters well-formed consciences not only by teaching moral truth but also by encouraging her members to develop the virtue of prudence. Prudence enables us “to discern our true good in every circumstance and to choose the right means of achieving it” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1806). Prudence shapes and informs our ability to deliberate over available alternatives, to determine what is most fitting to a specific context, and to act decisively. Exercising this virtue often requires the courage to act in defense of moral principles when making decisions about how to build a society of justice and peace (no. 19)

Discussion Questions:

- 1) What do you think of when you hear the word “conscience”? How does this compare to what the bishops describe as the elements of forming one’s conscience?
- 2) How might applying the process described by the bishops help you or others to prayerfully explore a particular issue or teaching?
- 3) What is the role of prudence in decision making? How does one develop prudence? Describe an example of the virtue of prudence in your own life or decision-making.
- 4) What implications do the bishops’ teachings on conscience and prudence have for you as an advocate and a voter?