

St. Mark Seeker's Study Guide

January 25, 2017: Sin and Grace

“Conscience is not a power but an act... For conscience, by the very nature of the word, implies the relation of knowledge to something.”

† St. Thomas Aquinas



1. If you remember from last week, what are the three elements of the moral act? What is the difference, morally, between what a surgeon does versus a bank robber armed with a knife according to the three elements of the moral act?
2. How do you think understanding the three elements of the moral act can aid you in a reasoned examination of your conscience?
3. How do the theological virtues direct our conscience towards God?
4. “Holiness is Wholeness” Describe someone you personally know who you think is a whole person? What role did the theological virtues play in their choices?

Points to Ponder

Grace and Virtue: In addition, God's grace is offered to us to purify and strengthen our human virtues, for our growth in virtue can be hampered by the reality of sin. Especially through prayer and the Sacraments, we open ourselves to the gifts of the Holy Spirit and God's grace as another way in which we grow in virtue.

5. What is your understanding of grace and sin? What role do the theological virtues play in the opposition of grace and sin?
6. The “ceaseless suck of self” or turning in on yourself is what we think of as sin. Sin is an offense against God. How do the theological virtues help us to respond to grace and resist sin?
7. The theological virtues direct us towards God. We can trust in God’s grace. Do you think it is possible to presume and to take God’s grace for granted?

Points to Ponder

Theological Virtues: The Theological Virtues of faith, hope, and charity (love) are those virtues that relate directly to God. These are not acquired through human effort but, beginning with Baptism, they are infused within us as gifts from God. They dispose us to live in relationship with the Holy Trinity. Faith, hope, and charity influence human virtues by increasing their stability and strength for our lives. Each of the Ten Commandments forbids certain sins, but each also points to virtues that will help us avoid such sins. Virtues such as generosity, poverty of spirit, gentleness, purity of heart, temperance, and fortitude assist us in overcoming and avoiding what are called the seven deadly or Capital Sins.

8. Do you think the essence of religion is just being good or is it the life of grace?
9. **Conscience** is a judgment of practical reason. **Judgment** is a decision. **Practical** is something we actually say or do. **Reason** is the use of our intellectual ability to guide our actions, not just pure emotion. Conscience must be based on truth. Conscience is taking responsibility for what we say and do. How can you sin against conscience?
10. What is the difference between an examination of conscience and the examination of consciousness?

Obeying Conscience

There are some rules to follow in obeying one’s conscience.

First, always follow a certain conscience.

Second, an incorrect conscience must be changed, if possible.

Third, do not act with a doubtful conscience.

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) (2012-04-02). United States Catholic Catechism for Adults. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB).

What role does an erroneous conscience play in life?

Error: We can be subjectively in error about something that is objectively true. On the objective level, if our conscience is “correct,” then there is no error between what is internally perceived to be true and truth itself. If there is an incorrect conscience, that means that the conscience is erroneous in its view of truth. On the subjective level we can have a “certain” conscience, which means we believe that our conscience is in conformity with what is objectively true. A person can have a “certain” conscience on the subjective level but an “incorrect” one on the objective level. For example, a person thinks that Ash Wednesday is a Holy Day of Obligation and chooses to miss Mass anyway. The person thinks it is a Holy Day (certain subjectively but incorrect objectively) and acts on it. This person has a certain but incorrect conscience. But because the conscience acted against what it perceived to be objectively the good, the conscience chooses to sin. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*