

## CONSCIENCE

Spirit is the meeting place between you and God. This meeting place is best known as our conscience. Conscience is like a sanctuary inside each of us in which light God reveals the truth about our lives and our existence to “spirit”. The light of God illuminates the mind and enables us to judge between right and wrong. Our conscience helps us become the persons God created us to be and in no way does it infringe on human freedom. ‘Truth’ and its fullness can heal the wounds of our human condition; it perfects freedom, and helps us to make good moral choices. Our human dignity is revealed in our conscience. It is where truth, that God endows everyone with, becomes a light to guide our spirit through our individual lives.

The conscience functions as a witness confronting the person with truth. Because God is truth, conscience is a kind of dialogue with God. Through conscience, the grace of God calls the human spirit to truth. It is as a light deep within that illuminates the path of love and goodness that he has set before us, to do what is good and to avoid evil. Our conscious is our most secret core and his sanctuary, and it functions as a judge that shows us what we should or should not do, or passes judgment about actions what we have already done. The natural law, which, as St. Paul explains as written on the heart, reveals to us that which is naturally moral.

However, the concern and desire for human liberty can lead us to deny truth and that denial can become a license to do whatever we want, even sin. Denial of conscience leads us to human blindness. Every person has a duty to seek truth and assent to it once it is found.

Jesus reveals that such freedom is acquired only in love. The whole of Christ's life was spent in self-giving actions that culminated in his sacrifice on the cross. We too have been called to give our lives in service to God by serving one another in communion with Christ. Our understanding of and obedience to the Holy Spirit ensures both the correct formation of conscience and the realization of moral freedom.

Forming one's conscience can at times be difficult. While we are all born with a conscience, developing a strong sense of conscience takes effort and help from God. Sin makes it difficult to discern between right and wrong. To help us, God gave us his Son to light our path and Jesus gave us his Church which preserves the teaching of his Apostles in the Sacred Tradition of the Church. We have an obligation to form our consciences so that we can accept the Church's teaching for what it truly is, the Holy Spirit that, gently leads us toward right paths.

Another challenge to forming one's conscience is the power of external opinion. We must be careful to form our conscience with truth and not mere opinion. Opinions sometimes masquerade themselves as judgments of conscience but actually serve a social desire to belong. We may feel strongly about particular issues but may have very little grounds to support those positions. It is easy to think we are following our consciences but we may only be following external opinions that have taken possession our consciences through the

influence of our close social networks and even mass media. A simple way to distinguish between an external opinion and the light of conscience is to compare it to the teachings of Christ and his Church. Our honesty and ability to admit mistaken opinions and submit to the teachings of Jesus are essential to the formation of a strong conscience that opens itself up to truth and finds its dignity in the light of God's love. Therefore, discernment between 'conscience' and mere 'opinion' is very important.

Educating our conscience takes time, prayer and intentional effort especially when, compared to popular opinions and self-pride, church teaching can seem outdated and even offensive to some. The RCIA process helps us rekindle our faith in the lordship of Jesus and in the sacramental guidance of his Church. During the RCIA process, the virtues of patience, humility, obedience, and prayer are important for the formation of a good conscience and prepare us for the sacraments of initiation. If you exercise these virtues, then the internal peace of Christ will remain even during times of confusion, anxiety and fear.

A good conscience gives us a moral compass that can guide all our actions and the virtues help us to weigh the circumstances and situations of life. The divine light that illuminates our conscience can bring about our transformation and a person transformed by the truth becomes truly different. In this way, we can be transformed by the renewal of our mind instead of just being conforming to the popular culture around us. If we can understand God as love and love being intrinsically united with truth, then conscience will transform our lives. A well-formed conscience brings to light what is the right thing to do and say. God's immanent grace, coupled with the practice of virtues can help us move one-step closer to meaningful and full communion with Christ and his Church.