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FREE WILL

My friends, you were chosen to be free. So don't use your freedom as an excuse to do anything you want. Use it as an opportunity to serve each other with love. (Galatians 5:13 CEV)

Read

God has given us the gift of **free will**, which is very special because none of God's other creations have this gift. Free will gives us the freedom and ability to choose how we are going to act. Free will allows us to form our own opinions and develop relationships with anyone we choose. God will never force us to do anything, even though he always wants us to make wise choices. If we decide to, we can love God and serve him. We can also choose not to have a relationship with him. God loves each of us very much, even when we do not show love for him in return.

God wants to share his life with us. He asks us not to sin and to live a responsible life of goodness and love. Our gift of free will makes us responsible for our actions and thoughts. Before we make a choice, we must think carefully about the consequences of that choice, and what God would want us to do.

Making good choices is not always an easy thing to do. It can be difficult to tell if we are doing the right thing. Sometimes, it is easier to make a choice to do something that is wrong instead of what God would want for us. Fortunately, God has given each of us a **conscience**, which helps us know the difference between good and bad. Our consciences help us before we make a decision because it makes us think about the good and bad consequences of a choice before we even make it! Our consciences also help us think about decisions we have already made, and let us know if we did the right thing.

Our consciences help us use God's gift of free will responsibly. When we use free will to choose to act the way God wants us to, it helps us grow in God's love and friendship.



We have to train ourselves to use our consciences properly. As Catholics, we learn how to make good choices through the examples Jesus set for us, the Beatitudes, the Ten Commandments, and the wisdom of the Church.

Think & Discuss

Think about each question. Discuss each question with the class.

1. Why doesn't God make our decisions for us?
2. Think of a time when you had to make a choice that was difficult. Why was it a difficult choice? Do you think you made the right choice?
3. What can you do to encourage others to use their free will wisely?

PRECEPTS OF THE CHURCH

Read

As Catholics, we are given some very specific responsibilities. The Church has given us a list of these duties, called **precepts of the Church**, to help describe what is required of us as members. The Church has given us these precepts to remind us that, in order to live the way God wants us to, we must make a commitment to actively involve ourselves in the activities of the Church, through prayer, celebrating the liturgy, and participating in the sacraments. There are five precepts of the Catholic Church.

Precept	Meaning
You will attend Mass on Sunday and holy days of obligation.	It is important for us to celebrate Mass and the holy days of obligation so that we can learn more about what God has done for us and how we can live according to his will.
You will confess your sins at least once a year.	This helps to prepare us to receive the Eucharist by giving us clean hearts.
You will receive the Sacrament of the Eucharist at least during the Easter season.	This precept guarantees that we receive the Body and Blood of Christ at least once a year, during the Easter Season.
You will observe the days of fasting and abstinence established by the Church.	Fasting and abstinence help prepare our hearts and minds to celebrate holy days and other liturgical feasts. (Children, the elderly, people who are ill, pregnant or nursing women, and some laborers are not required to participate in fasting.)
You will help to provide for the needs of the Church.	It is important that we help provide for the material needs of the Church, according to our own abilities.

The precepts of the Church describe what is minimally required of us as Catholics. When we choose not to follow the precepts of the Church, we are committing a sin. Of course, there are some instances where we are not sinning: for instance, if we miss Mass on Sunday because we are sick or have to care for someone who is sick, it is not a sin. The precepts of the Church are very important to us because they help us commit ourselves to lovingly serving God and our Church community.

Think & Discuss

Think about each question. Discuss each question with the class.

1. Why has the Church given us the five precepts?
2. Which precept of the Church do you think is the most important to follow? Why?
3. If you miss Mass because you are sick, it is not a sin. How can you tell when failing to follow one of the precepts is a sin, and when it is not a sin?

GOD'S COVENANT WITH NOAH

Never again will I punish the earth for the sinful things its people do. All of them have evil thoughts from the time they are young, but I will never destroy everything that breathes, as I did this time. (Genesis 8:21 CEV)

Read

After Adam and Eve committed original sin, evil entered the world. God became upset with mankind because they were disobeying his will and failing to be good stewards of his creation.

In the book of Genesis, we read that God told a man named Noah, "Cruelty and violence have spread everywhere. Now I'm going to destroy the whole earth and all its people." (Genesis 6:13) Noah was a good man who loved God, so God chose to give him the responsibility of building a great ark. Noah was to bring his wife and family, and fill the ark with two of every living animal, one male and one female. When the ark was complete, and two of every living thing was aboard, God sent forty days and nights of rain. The entire earth became flooded, and everything was destroyed, except for the ark.

When the flood finally receded, Noah, his family, and the animals were all that were left on earth. To show his thanks to God, Noah built an altar and made a sacrifice. In return, God made a covenant with Noah. He promised that even if mankind were to fail again in the future, he would never again send a flood to destroy all bodily life on earth. The sign of God's covenant with Noah was a rainbow.

The story of God's covenant with Noah is very important to our faith. Noah and his family survived the flood to lead a new life free from the evils that God washed away with the flood. This is similar to the way we receive new life through the water poured on us at our Baptism that frees us from sin. During our Baptism, God makes a commitment to us to always love us and guide us. The rainbow reminds us that God will always be with us to protect us.



The only people on the ark were Noah; his wife; their sons, Japheth, Ham, and Shem; and their sons' wives. These were the only eight people to survive the flood.

Think & Discuss

Think about each question. Discuss each question with the class.

1. Why do you think God chose Noah to build the ark? How was Noah different from the other people on earth?
2. Why did God make a covenant with Noah to never again flood the earth?
3. Why do you think the rainbow is a symbol of God's covenant?

THE BEATITUDES

Read

Jesus spent his life sharing the message of God's love for his people and giving them hope. People wanted to hear what Jesus was saying about God so that they could grow closer to him. Jesus invited them to follow him and live by his example and teachings.

Jesus truly wanted all of us to be able to share in the happiness of God's kingdom. He knew that in order for us to have eternal life in heaven, we needed to learn how to love God and our neighbors. One day, a crowd gathered by the mountains. That day, Jesus gave a sermon to the people, which is now referred to as the Sermon on the Mount. During this sermon, he gave us the **Beatitudes**, which are teachings that describe true happiness and show us what life will be like in God's kingdom. In the Beatitudes, the word "blessed" means happy. In each Beatitude, Jesus teaches us how to live a life of true happiness. If we follow Jesus' teachings, we will be led to God's kingdom in heaven.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:3)

God wants us to put him first in our lives and acknowledge our need for him.

"Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted." (Matthew 5:4)

God wants us to help those who are sad or suffering, and give them hope and comfort.

"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land." (Matthew 5:5)

God wants us to be patient, gentle, and respectful to everyone, even those who hurt us.

"Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied."

(Matthew 5:6) God wants us to treat everyone fairly and work for justice.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy." (Matthew 5:7)

God wants us to be compassionate and forgive those who hurt us.

"Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God." (Matthew 5:8)

God wants us to love him and follow his laws.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." (Matthew 5:9)

God wants us to bring peace to our neighborhoods and the world.

"Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:10) God wants us to make good choices, even when they are difficult.

Think & Discuss

Think about each question. Discuss each question with the class.

1. What did Jesus do to live according to the Beatitudes?
2. How can following the Beatitudes make a positive difference in your school?
3. How would the world be different if everyone followed the Beatitudes?

WORKS OF MERCY

*Render true judgment, and show kindness and compassion toward each other.
(Zechariah 7:8-9)*

Read

Jesus lived his life devoted to caring for others. He especially took care of the poor and the sick by performing miracles and caring for their needs. As Catholics, Jesus expects us to follow his loving example and care for the needs of others. He calls us to live in peace with our neighbors and show love and mercy to everyone, even those who are difficult to deal with!

The Church takes Jesus' teachings very seriously. In the Book of Matthew, we learn how to care for the basic physical needs of others through the **corporal works of mercy**. These acts show us how to respond to the needs of God's people.

Jesus wants us to care for more than the physical needs of others. He wants us to care for the hearts and souls of others too. The Church uses the **spiritual works of mercy** to give love, support, and encouragement to those who need it most.

The corporal and spiritual works of mercy guide us in providing for the needs of others. Each time we complete an act of mercy, we grow in holiness and help make the world a better place for everyone.

Corporal Works of Mercy	Spiritual Works of Mercy
Feed the hungry	Counsel the doubtful
Give drink to the thirsty	Instruct the ignorant
Clothe the naked	Admonish sinners
Shelter the homeless	Comfort the afflicted
Visit the sick	Forgive offenses
Visit the imprisoned	Bear wrongs patiently
Bury the dead	Pray for the living and the dead

Think & Discuss

Think about each question. Discuss each question with the class.

1. Do you feel that it is easier to perform a corporal or spiritual work of mercy? Why?
2. What ministries in your parish provide for the physical and spiritual needs of others?
3. Have you ever volunteered for something? Would you consider this to be a work of mercy? Why or why not?

