

Doctrinal Session

APPRENTICES IN FAITH: A Resource for the OCIA Freedom in Christ: Part II

*I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. . . . Who will rescue me from this body of death?
Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!* (Romans 7:15, 24b-25)

Insight

What recent situation presented you with a moral choice? How and what did you decide to do?

Waiting in line to check out at the supermarket, Theresa asked Bernie how her plans for the graduation party were coming.

Bernie revealed she was going to do what some other parents in the neighborhood had done before. She was going to have some beer available at the party so the kids could drink at the house. She also told Theresa that she planned to take car keys away so the kids couldn't drive and be a danger to themselves or others.

Theresa realized she had a tough decision to make. She thought about it, prayed, and decided she could not allow her son to attend the party. They would just send a card with a gift. Bernie's intention might be good in keeping the kids off the roads, but it was illegal to offer beer to underage drinkers. It was teaching them that breaking the law and underage drinking was all right. And besides, was Bernie even checking with the other parents whose kids would be attending?

Now Theresa had yet another dilemma on her hands. She realized that she had a duty to confront Bernie with all the implications involved, because Bernie herself was likely not seeing them.

For Reflection . . .

Free will, and thus the ability to shape our lives, is often exercised in relationship to others.

What relationships are life-giving for you? Why?

Which relationships might impede life for you? Why?

Additional Background

Catechism of the Catholic Church: 1738, 1749–1761

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults: pages 310–312

Compendium—Catechism of the Catholic Church: 363–369

Church Teaching

Catholic Moral Tradition

We are confronted with situations that require us to make moral choices. What we decide to do in these situations represents a step toward good or evil.

Evaluating Our Actions

How do we evaluate the morality of a given situation? Three basic components of human acts help in determining morality. Those three basic elements are

- *The object:* the thing being done
- *The intention:* why we do that thing
- *The circumstances:* details of when, how, with whom, and the consequences

The object itself must be good for an action to be moral. Some acts are always wrong, in and of themselves. Some examples would be murder, torture, rape, adultery, fornication, and blasphemy. They are intrinsically evil because no matter the intention or circumstances, they go against a fundamental human good.

The intention resides within the individual and is subjective. For an act to be morally good, the intention must also be good. If one's motivation is sinful, then even a morally good act can be tainted (such as giving alms due to vanity).

The circumstances alone do not determine right and wrong. They may, however, increase or decrease the goodness of an act or affect the person's responsibility for it (such as the amount of a theft or acting out of fear or under duress).

For a human action to be morally good, all three elements that are involved in it must be good.