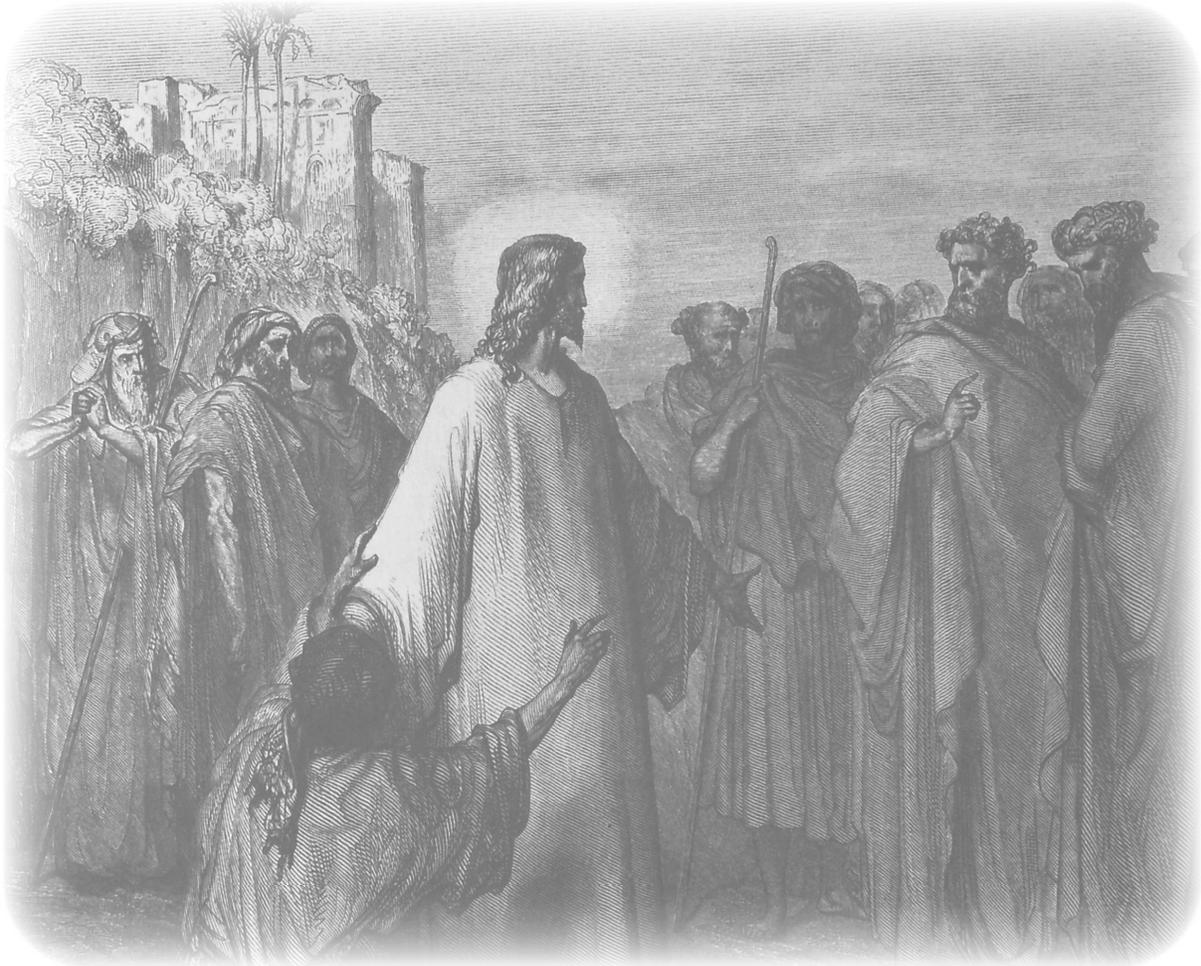


L

LEADER GUIDE

LIVING THE CREED
SESSION 6



A CATHOLIC
MORAL VISION

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SESSION OVERVIEW

The word morality is often viewed as something negative today. It is associated with “rules” that keep us from having too much fun. But that’s not the Catholic view of morality. For the Catholic Church, morality is all about the quest for happiness. In Catholic teaching, living a moral life means following the plan of the God who made us so that we can be fully alive. It means becoming all that God has created us to be.

So why does the world have such a different take on morality than the Catholic Church? Much of the world today holds to moral relativism: the idea that everyone can make up their own morality, that there isn’t really anything right or wrong, true or false—all that matters is that you follow what you believe.

One problem with moral relativism is that it is focused on self. Without a higher standard outside of ourselves calling us to generosity, perseverance, loyalty, and heroic sacrifice, we become trapped in self-interest. Instead of following God’s plan for our lives, we follow our own plan, making up our own ethics, which, instead of challenging us to give ourselves more in sacrificial love, often supports our own advantage, comfort, or pleasure.

In this week’s session, we learn that morality is simply following our Maker’s plan for our lives and in doing so, we become authentically whole and holy.



SESSION SNAPSHOT

Review the entire lesson plan in advance so you are prepared to lead and discuss comfortably. Gather necessary supplies and review video segments prior to your gathering. Use the time allotments in the session outline below as a guideline, as the length of time spent on each section will vary from group to group.

| TIME | SECTION | SECTION OVERVIEW |
|------------|---------|---|
| 20 minutes | CONNECT | Lead group members in an activity about their identities, and then introduce the topic and open in prayer. |
| 50 minutes | DISCUSS | Watch and discuss video segments. Scene 1: The Cardinal Virtues Scene 2: Achieving True Freedom Scene 3: Truth Matters Scene 4: Grace to Change |
| 20 minutes | COMMIT | Review the key points, challenge group members to pray the “Litany of Humility” daily, and close in prayer. |

SUPPLIES NEEDED

- » Media device to show video segments
- » Bibles
- » Participant Sheets
- » Paper and pencils

PREPARE IN ADVANCE

- » Have snacks ready.
- » Create a welcoming environment.



LEADER TIPS

- » We often include possible responses and material from the *Catechism* after the discussion questions to help you facilitate the conversation. It is best to let group members respond first and share the concepts in parentheses only as needed.
- » To understand this topic more deeply, consider purchasing, “Seven Deadly Sins—Seven Lively Virtues” by Bishop Robert Barron through Lighthouse Catholic Media.

lighthousecatholicmedia.org/store/title/seven-deadly-sins-seven-lively-virtues



CONNECT



ACTIVITY

ALL IN A NAME

Distribute paper and pencils. Then explain the activity as follows:

SAY: Write your full name at the top of your paper with a dash at the end. After the dash, write a funny meaning for your name in 10 words or less. For example, it could read: John Michael Smith—the man with exceptionally bad taste in clothing.

Give the group time to write a funny meaning to their name, and then have each share it with the group.

SAY: Again, write your full name with a dash, but this time write a meaning for your name that is an accurate portrayal of your personality. For example, it could read: John Michael Smith—a fun guy who is committed to his friends.

Give the group time to write a meaning that reflects their personality, and then have each share it with the group.

SAY: Finally, write your full name with a dash, but this time write a heroic meaning to your name, something that you aspire to be. For example, it could read: John Michael Smith—a man whose character inspires the best out of others.

Give the group time to write a heroic meaning to their name, and then have each share it with the group.



INTRODUCTION

SAY: Thanks for giving some thought about who you are and who you would like to become. In this session, we are going to be talking about becoming the hero of your own life. When we think of heroes we think of strength, bravery, and self-sacrifice. The Christian life calls us to nothing less, because living a moral life requires strength, bravery, and self-sacrifice. But, as we will discuss in this session, that is the path to true happiness. The Church calls moral strengths virtues. The virtuous life is to know the truth and to live it.



OPENING PRAYER

SAY: Let's begin with a passage from Romans 7 and then share together a prayer from St. Augustine of Hippo.

Have someone read aloud Romans 7:15-25a.



"I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. So then it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

—Romans 7:15-25a

PRAY: Christ Jesus, Sweet Lord, why have I ever loved, why in my whole life have I ever desired anything except You, Jesus my God? Where was I when I was not in spirit with You? Now, from this time forth, do You, all my desires, grow hot, and flow out upon the Lord Jesus....O, Sweet Jesus, may every good feeling that is fitted for Your praise, love You, delight in You, adore You! God of my heart, and my Portion, Christ Jesus, may my heart faint away in spirit, and may You be my Life within me. Amen.

—St. Augustine of Hippo



DISCUSS

SAY: Let's watch the first scene of this session.



*Watch the first video segment. The video will last about 4 minutes.
At the end of the segment, discuss.*

SAY: Dr. Sri references the fresco paintings of the cardinal virtues by Raphael inside the Vatican museums. In them we see a beautiful vision of the Catholic moral life. To be virtuous is to live a joy-filled life.

The cardinal virtues are prudence, temperance, fortitude, and justice. Prudence is to know what is true and good, temperance and fortitude is to have the self-control and courage to do what is true and good, and justice is giving to others what is true and good.

- » Prudence is depicted as a woman with two faces—one face looking back and the other face looking into a mirror. There is a cupid, Hope, behind her holding a flaming torch. If prudence is “sound judgment,” how does this scene depict this virtue?

(The face looking back is that of an older, bearded man, showing that wisdom is gained from life experience. The face looking into the mirror represents the “long, hard look” of self-examination and seeing the truth clearly in order to make good decisions. The flaming torch of hope is to know who we are called to be and the confidence that we can change with God’s grace. As St. Paul mentions in Romans 7:24-25 regarding his struggle to do what is right: “Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”)

- » Temperance, or self-control, is depicted as a lady pulling back the reins, not letting herself be enslaved by pleasure. She is guarding the cupid Faith, who is pointing at the sky with his right hand. How does this scene depict self-control?

(The Catechism teaches: “Temperance is the moral virtue that moderates the attraction of pleasures and provides balance in the use of created goods. It ensures the will’s mastery over instincts and keeps desires within the limits of what is honorable” [CCC 1809]. Faith motivates us to strengthen our will and gain mastery over our passions, because we know if we don’t they will pull us away from God. Faith is our response to Jesus, who says, “Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven” [Matthew 6:20]. Perhaps that is why the cupid is pointing to heaven.)

- » Fortitude, or courage, is depicted as a lady dressed like a soldier with a lion in her lap. She demonstrates her strength by pulling down an oak tree with the cupid Charity shaking its branch. How does this scene depict courage?

(The Catechism teaches that fortitude “strengthens the resolve to resist temptations and to overcome obstacles in the moral life. The virtue of fortitude enables one to conquer fear, even fear of death, and to face trials and persecutions” [CCC 1808]. In other words, fortitude is the courage to do what is right no matter the circumstances. First John 4:18 reads: “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.” Perhaps this is why the cupid Charity is shaking the branch—to show that love takes courage.)

- » Justice is depicted in two scenes, one showing ecclesiastical (Church) authority and the other civil authority. In each scene a book of law is being handed down from the person in authority—canon law from the Pope and civil law from the governor. How do these scenes depict the virtue of justice?

(In these two scenes we see justice toward God and justice toward men. The Catechism teaches that “justice toward God is called the ‘virtue of religion.’ Justice toward men disposes one to respect the rights of each and to establish in human relationships the harmony that promotes equity with regard to persons and to the common good” [CCC 1807]. The law handed down is to govern our actions toward God and man. With prudence, temperance, and fortitude, we are able to be just toward God and others.)

SAY: Let’s continue with Scene 2.



Watch the second video segment. The video will last about 6 minutes.
At the end of the segment, discuss.

SAY: Freedom is not simply a choice but an achievement that requires skills. For example, someone may value classical music but they will not have the freedom to play classical music if they have not acquired the skill to play an instrument. The skills needed in the moral life that brings true freedom are the virtues.

» Ron Garofalo is a three-time world champion powerlifter. He trains young men in the sport of powerlifting in his gym called Virtus, which is Latin for virtue. What is the relationship between strength and virtue?

(The will is like a muscle. With training it can be strengthened. Without training, muscle can atrophy [waste away] and become weak. Virtue is strength of will, and vice is weakness of will. To strengthen a muscle you need to subject it to heavy weight. The resistance causes the muscle to respond and grow. In the moral life, the heavy weight is temptation and difficulty. Pushing through this resistance strengthens the will, and resisting temptation and pushing through difficulty becomes easier and easier. Doing what is right with relative ease is what brings freedom and happiness.)

» American novelist Mark Twain said: “It is curious that physical courage should be so common in the world and moral courage so rare.” What is your interpretation of this quote?

(Physical courage can be seen when someone does his or her duty and/or protects others despite danger of injury. It is admirable. However, it can take far greater courage to do what one knows to be right, which may result in misunderstanding, disapproval, and even ridicule. A person with moral courage is willing to make personal sacrifices in order to do what is right. Integrity is having the moral courage to do what is right when no one is watching.)

SAY: Let’s continue with Scene 3.



Watch the third video segment. The video will last about 7 minutes.
At the end of the segment, discuss.

SAY: To make a good moral choice the intention must be good, the circumstances must be good, and the act itself must be good. This is why we may never perform evil to achieve a good. To make a bad moral choice is to sin. It contradicts God's law and therefore contradicts what is good for us.

- » Some people argue that cohabitation before marriage is a good decision. They say: "You don't buy a car without test-driving it first." How would you respond to that statement?

(It seems reasonable to think that "test-driving" a marriage will result in stronger marriages, but in fact the opposite has been true. Research has shown that cohabitation actually leads to higher divorce rates. God's plan is that sexual intimacy be an act of total self-gift within the covenant of marriage. Without the wedding vows and commitment to each other for a lifetime, total self-gift is not possible. In other words, like all sin, cohabitation is disordered and is an example of why the ends cannot justify the means.)

- » When husbands or wives say something that hurts their spouse, they need to apologize and reconcile. However, if husbands or wives commit adultery, more than an apology is required to heal the relationship. How does this example show the difference between mortal and venial sin?

(The Catholic Church teaches that a mortal sin is grave, breaks our covenantal relationship with God, and deprives the soul of sanctifying grace. A venial sin weakens charity in the soul but does not break our covenant with God. Venial sins still need to be taken seriously and confessed or they will likely weaken the soul to the point of giving into mortal sin. Similarly, marriage is a covenantal relationship. Spouses can hurt one another in marriage but not rupture their relationship. They need to seek forgiveness with each other or their relationship will deteriorate and may eventually dissolve. Adultery, however, ruptures the covenantal relationship between husband and wife, as the trust between them is destroyed. It is one thing to hurt a relationship and another to destroy it. Mortal sin destroys our relationship with God. We can be forgiven, but there are always consequences to sin. The greater the sin, the greater the consequences. The Church calls the consequences of sin temporal punishment. In other words, we will need to be purified and healed from the attachments and damages that sin causes. Similarly, it will take much time to overcome the hurt and distrust that adultery causes.)

SAY: The Church calls us to perform corporal works of mercy: feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, visit the sick, visit the imprisoned, and bury the dead. The Church also calls us to spiritual works of mercy: admonish the sinner, instruct the ignorant, counsel the doubtful, comfort the sorrowful, bear wrongs patiently, forgive all injuries, and pray for the living and the dead. Mercy understood in this sense is having compassion for others and, if possible, alleviating their burdens.

- » Why is helping someone to form their conscience in the truth a spiritual work of mercy?

(The Catechism teaches: "The education of conscience is indispensable for human beings who are subjected to negative influences and tempted by sin to prefer their own judgment and to reject authoritative teachings" [CCC 1783]. To instruct the ignorant and counsel the doubtful is to help form

their conscience according to the truth so that the truth will set them free. If we fail to act according to God's plan, whether we know it or not, we will suffer the consequences. This is why it is merciful and loving to share the truth with others.)

SAY: Let's continue with Scene 4.



Watch the final video segment. The video will last about 4½ minutes. At the end of the segment, discuss.

SAY: Charles Dickens begins his novel *David Copperfield* with the sentence: "Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show." St. Paul, however, makes it sound that it is impossible to be the hero of your own life. He writes to the Romans: "**For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members**" (Romans 7:22-23).

» How does the Good News of Jesus Christ reconcile these two statements?

(Ephesians 2:8-10 reads: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." In other words, we can be the hero of our own lives by placing our faith in Jesus and cooperating with His grace in order to be set free from the "law of sin" and perform the good works God has prepared for us. With God's grace, we can be heroes—strong, brave, and self-sacrificial.)



COMMIT



ACTIVITY

TAKE-AWAY

SAY: I am going to go around the circle, starting with the person on my right, and I'd like each of us to share something we remember that this person said tonight.

Take a minute and go around the group, asking everyone to share briefly. Then continue.

Now I want to go around the circle again, this time starting with the person on my left, and I'd like each of us to share one take-away from tonight. In other words, share something that resonates in your heart as a truth to live by.

Give everyone time to share, and then continue.

SAY: When something resonates with our hearts we should be mindful to take that to prayer, as that is generally how the Holy Spirit works. So I encourage you to take whatever touched your heart in this session into your prayer this week. In addition to prayer, how are your spiritual H.A.B.I.T.S. coming along?

Encourage your group to share how they have grown spiritually since your last meeting by practicing spiritual H.A.B.I.T.S. Ask them if there is any way you can help them in their commitment to developing spiritual H.A.B.I.T.S. You can find the H.A.B.I.T.S. in the Leader Guide for Follow Me, Session 5: The Cost. After everyone has shared, follow up on last week's commitments before discussing the new commitment.

SAY: St. Augustine said that humility is the foundation of all virtues. The challenge this week is to pray "The Litany of Humility" at the start of each day. You'll find it on your take-home page.



CLOSING PRAYER

SAY: Let's close our time together today by praying "The Litany of Humility."

PRAY: The Litany of Humility

O Jesus! meek and humble of heart, Hear me.
From the desire of being esteemed,
Deliver me, Jesus.

From the desire of being loved...
From the desire of being extolled...
From the desire of being honored...
From the desire of being praised...
From the desire of being preferred to others...
From the desire of being consulted...
From the desire of being approved...
From the fear of being humiliated...
From the fear of being despised...
From the fear of suffering rebukes...
From the fear of being calumniated...
From the fear of being forgotten...
From the fear of being ridiculed...
From the fear of being wronged...
From the fear of being suspected...

That others may be loved more than I,
Jesus, grant me the grace to desire it.

That others may be esteemed more than I...
That, in the opinion of the world, others may increase and I may decrease...
That others may be chosen and I set aside...
That others may be praised and I unnoticed...
That others may be preferred to me in everything...
That others may become holier than I, provided that I may become as holy as I should...
Amen.