

## An Examination of Conscience

An examination of conscience gives each individual an opportunity to examine herself or himself in light of God's Word. Questions, like these, will help you examine your conscience.

**Love of God.** The Lord says, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart" (Mark 12:30). You might ask yourself such questions as:

- How am I faithful or unfaithful to God's commandments?
- Have I been careful to grow in my understanding of the faith, to hear God's word, to listen to instructions on the faith?
- How am I including God in my future?

**Love of Neighbor.** The Lord says, "[L]ove one another as I love you" (John 15:12). You might ask yourself such questions as:

- How am I using the authority that Christ shares with me to build up the reign of God and a better future for the world?
- Have I been obedient to my parents? Have I shown respect for my grandparents? How do I respect the people who have the authority and responsibility to care for me?
- Do I use my friends and others for my own ends?
- Do I do my best to help victims of oppression, people who are homeless, people living in poverty?

**Love of Self.** Christ our Lord says, "So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). Ask yourself such questions as:

- Where is my life going?
- What use have I made of time, of health and strength, of the gifts God has given me?

Based on *Rite of Penance*

## IMPORTANT TERMS TO KNOW

**circumstances**—the context and consequences of a moral act—the who, how, when, and where of the act

**conscience**—"a judgment of reason whereby the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act that he is going to perform, is in the process of performing, or has already completed" (CCC, 1778)

**intention**—the motive or purpose for a moral act—the why of the act

**Magisterium**—the official teaching authority in the Church, consisting of the pope and the bishops in communion with him. In the area of morality, the Magisterium has the Christ-given right and duty to proclaim who we are and what we should be before God (see CCC, 2036).

**object**—the matter of an act: what we do—the what of the act

**passions**—our feelings or emotions that move us to act or not to act

## CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, we looked at some principles of the Church's moral teaching and Jesus' guidance to learn how to form our conscience and choose correctly. We learned that:

1. The sources of the morality of every human act are the object, the intention, and the circumstances.
2. Some actions are always wrong because they are contrary to our good and God's will.
3. A good intention for an action cannot justify evil means to attain it.
4. Passions are emotions that move us to act or not act in relation to something we feel or imagine to be good or evil. They are neither good nor evil.
5. Conscience is the judgment of reason that enables us to determine the moral quality of a concrete act. It operates before we act, during our act, and after we act.
6. We have the responsibility to form our conscience according to reason and true good willed by God, the Creator. We must always follow our conscience.
7. It is possible for us to form an erroneous conscience. Factors like ignorance, emotion, peer pressure, total self-reliance, a cold heart, and the like, can contribute to an erroneous conscience. Ignorance is not always free of guilt.
8. The Magisterium of the Church has Christ-given authority to teach how to live a moral life in accord with God's will.

## EXPLORING OUR CATHOLIC FAITH

### 1. Listening to God's Word

Read and reflect on Mark 10:17–22. What choice did Jesus offer the young man? How did he respond? What might have been some of the factors that led the young man to his decision?

### 2. Understanding the Teachings of the Catholic Church

Pope John Paul II taught: "The primary and decisive element for moral judgment is the object of the human act, which establishes whether it is *capable of being ordered to the good and to the ultimate end, which is God*" (*The Splendor of Truth*, 79). Explain what this teaching means.

### 3. Reflecting on Our Catholic Faith

Someone offered this insight: "Wrong is wrong, even if everyone is doing it. Right is right, even though no one else does it." Does this insight guide you in making moral decisions? Write your thoughts in your journal.

### 4. Living Our Catholic Faith

Review the DECIDE steps for making a moral decision. Choose a situation that you are facing and apply the steps.