

HOMILY 6TH SUN OT YRA 2020

There was a mother who was working with her son on his spelling homework. Two of the spelling words were conscious and conscience. The mother said: “Bobby, do you know what these two words mean, conscious and conscience?” And this is what Bobby said: “conscious is when you are aware of something. Conscience is when you wish you weren’t.” I think this is pretty good for a kid. We all know what he means.

I think conscience formation is what the Gospel reading is all about today. We don’t talk so much about individual conscience formation these days, so I want to talk about it today. In the Gospel reading Jesus says: “I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.” Now the scribes and the Pharisees followed the letter of the law, the law given to them by God and the law they made up themselves. The problem is that they were just following a bunch of laws without developing a clear sense of right and wrong. As long as they followed the letter of the law, it did not matter if they even understood the spirit of the law or what the law was trying to accomplish. And then they judged and criticized people who were not following the letter of the law. As Christians we are responsible for our own individual conscience formation, an internal sense of right and wrong based upon Catholic teaching. Pope Francis has been very clear about this in the encyclical, *The Joy of Love*. He said that priests must inform Catholic consciences but not replace them. He said that there is a distinction between developing our individual conscience based upon God’s revelation and individuals doing whatever they please. We should not be blindly following rules or judging one another. We need to understand the reasons for the laws and judge ourselves based upon how God wants us to behave.

Jesus says: “You have heard that it was said to your ancestors, You shall not kill, and who ever kills will be liable to judgment. But I say to you, whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to

judgment.” This is what individual conscience formation is about. Internalizing the reasons why killing is wrong, and identifying the things that fall short of murder, but are still wrong. It seems to me that anger is at one end of the spectrum and murder is at the other. Anger is a feeling and a normal reaction when someone hurts us. Feelings just are and are not sinful in themselves. We sometimes have to sit with anger for a while before we can forgive and let go of the anger. When do we hold on to anger too long? When does failure to forgive become sinful? How long does it take before you start acting on this anger and hurting others? When do we talk about someone to try and resolve issues or to reconcile with another individual and when does it become gossip, murdering someone’s reputation? When does joking or kidding become abusive or bullying? This has a lot to do with the person that is on the receiving end of the kidding or the joking. A joke that would be ok with one person may be very hurtful to another. We need to empathize with the person on the receiving end. If you know your comments are hurtful to another, you are getting into the sin area. If your intent is to hurt someone, that is sinful. What about perpetuation prejudice and bias? It may not be offensive to the people that you are talking to but it is hurtful to the members of the group you are prejudice or bias against. What is our responsibility to help and protect the poor and the vulnerable? Do we blame them for being poor or vulnerable? Do we re-victimize the victims? As Catholics we are called to respect all human life from the moment of conception to the time of natural death. We cannot come up with a whole list of rules to cover every situation. We need to develop our own individual conscience.

Are you just conscious of the rules or have you developed your own individual conscience. Do you have an internal sense of right and wrong based upon how God is calling us to live?