

HOMILY February 22, 2026
6TH SUNDAY ORDINARY TIME

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.

In the Gospel reading Jesus is talking about three of the Ten Commandments. “You shall not kill.” “You shall not commit adultery.” “Do not take a false oath.” These sound really straight forward, but to truly understand these commandments requires thought and prayer. Jesus expands upon each of these commandments in the reading today which gives us a better understanding of what they mean. The Catholic Church has a lot of rules. We have to do more than just know the rules. We need to understand them and determine how we are each going to live them out in our lives. This is called individual conscience formation. It is a lifelong process. It involves making moral judgments based upon Sacred Scripture, Church teaching and God’s will in our lives. It requires prayer and reflection. This starts with understanding Church teaching. Sometimes people tell me that they do not agree with certain teaching but sometimes this is because there is a misunderstanding of the teaching. One example of this that I have seen over the years is the status of Divorced Catholics. Some people feel they are not longer welcome in the Church or they cannot receive the sacraments. Being divorced does not change your status in the Catholic Church. Sometimes the rules are very clear, but when we apply them to our lives, the application is not so clear. We are very complicated human beings and we do not fall neatly into categories. I am not talking about rationalizing immoral behavior. We can pretty much rationalize anything if we want to. It is about understanding the teachings and discerning how you can live them out considering your particular life situation. It involves struggling with the issues and determining exactly how you can do good and avoid evil.

Take the Commandment “You shall not kill.” I have talked to people who say “I am a good person. I have not killed anybody or anything.” Well, that is good, but I am looking at a whole congregation of people before me who can say the same thing. I think the Commandment means much more. I think it is closely tied to the Catholic social teaching of respecting the dignity of all human persons from the moment of conception to the time of natural death. This includes a great deal. It includes gossip, insults, defamation and slander. When we engage in this behavior we are murdering the individual’s reputation. There is no place for hatred in our world. We need to examine how our government is treating people. Regardless of your opinion on specifics, I think we can pretty much all agree that people need to be treated with dignity. Can we respect a person’s human dignity even when we disagree? How is God calling you to live this out?

How about “You shall not commit adultery.” Pornography is a huge part of this Commandment, abusing people and using them as objects for our pleasure. This is a huge multi-billion dollar industry. It can lead to addiction, devaluing our relationships, increased risky behavior and violence. We cannot participate in the abuse. And what about our commitment to our families? Do we work out problems or do we disengage? Good family relationships are difficult to maintain. How is God calling you to live this out in your life.

How about “Do not take a false oath.” Does your yes mean yes and your no mean no? Do we tell half truths that purposely mislead people? Do we misrepresent the truth to make ourselves look better or to make someone else look bad. Do we remain silent when the right thing to do is to speak up? How is God calling you to live this out in your life?

Individual conscience formation is a life-long task. Once you get one issue worked out, there will be another. Struggle with the rules and pray about them. Discern how these values apply to your life and how you are going to live them out. How are you going to do good and avoid evil?