

ONE

The One Who Has Faith Lives Differently

The title of this first chapter is adapted from Pope Benedict's second encyclical, *Saved by Hope*, in which the Holy Father writes: "The one who has hope lives differently." The use of the word *faith* captures the essence of this entire book, that the faith must be lived in a hopeful way. At its heart, moreover, living the faith is about free choices. We make choices each day: at home with our families, in the workplace, at places of recreation, and during the time we spend alone. Understood properly, "human freedom is more than a capacity to choose between this and that. It is the God-given power to become who he created us to be and so to share eternal union with him" (USCCA 310). To live in this way is the basis of our hope as followers of Jesus. Understood in this way, true freedom makes it possible for us to live differently than the popular understanding of freedom that is defined by simply doing what *I* wish to do.

How then does our Catholic faith—a faith rooted in the living person of Jesus Christ—give us direction and inner strength to make the right choices? How is it that our faith helps us form our consciences to make those correct choices? At the outset, we must define what conscience is. Simply stated by the Second Vatican Council,

“conscience is man’s most secret core, and his sanctuary. There he is alone with God whose voice echoes in his depths” (GS 16). The Council also teaches that the “voice, ever calling him to love and to do what is good and to avoid evil, tells him inwardly at the right moment: do this, shun that” (GS 16). Following one’s conscience has consequences. Carl A. Anderson points to the beloved English saint, Thomas More, as an appropriate guide: “For he used all his brilliance as a lawyer to avoid conflict with King Henry VIII. Yet, finally, when direct conflict could no longer be avoided, he sacrificed both his family’s security and his very life for the sake of his Catholic conscience.” In that same article, Anderson quotes the then-Cardinal Ratzinger’s reference to the conversion to Catholicism of Blessed John Henry Newman. Cardinal Ratzinger stated that Newman’s “conversion to Catholicism cost him dearly and came about as a need to obey the truth in his conscience. In a letter to the Duke of Norfolk, Newman wrote, ‘If I am obliged to bring religion into after-dinner toasts . . . I shall drink—to the Pope, if you please—still, to Conscience first, and to the Pope afterwards.’”

Both More and Newman had clearly formed consciences. Conscience formation is a lifelong effort, and it takes place according to objective moral standards. “The Word of God is a principal tool in the formation of conscience when it is assimilated by study, prayer, and practice” (USCCA 314). In addition, our consciences are formed with the prudent advice and good example of others, especially the authoritative teaching of the Church and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Traditionally, the work of conscience formation has taken place in parishes, Catholic schools and, above all, in the family.

For this reason, the strengthening of family life is a most important priority in the New Evangelization.

As described by Pope Benedict, the New Evangelization is:

... a renewed evangelization in the countries where the first proclamation of the faith has already resonated and where Churches with an ancient foundation exist but are experiencing the progressive secularization of society and a sort of “eclipse of the sense of God,” which pose a challenge to finding appropriate means to propose anew the perennial truth of Christ’s Gospel. (June 28, 2010)

Or as Washington Cardinal Donald Wuerl writes in his pastoral letter on the New Evangelization:

Somehow in what we do and how we express our faith, we have to be able to repropose our belief in Christ and his Gospel for a hearing among those who are convinced that they already know the faith and it holds no interest for them. We have to invite them to hear it all over again, this time for the first time.

The New Evangelization is ultimately about a new and hopeful way of looking at the world and living in it through the lens of a welcoming Gospel. In his magnificent encyclical, *Saved by Hope (Spe Salvi)*, Benedict XVI teaches us: “The one who has hope lives differently: the one who hopes has been granted the gift of a new life”

(SS 2). At its heart, then, the moral life is about living that informed hope within us. But how is this possible?

The answer can be found in Galatians 2:20, where St. Paul writes, "Yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me." These are revolutionary words. Do we ever stop to think about their impact? Christ lives within us. His presence, to the extent we yield to it and to the presence of his Holy Spirit, makes us live different and more hopeful lives. We are not alone. Not only are we made in the image and likeness of God, which is a basic principle of the moral life and our human dignity; but by his living presence within us, we are able to act differently and live more hopefully. He so desires to express himself through our facial expressions, the tone of our voices, even our body language. You and I are credible witnesses to our faith to the extent that we mirror the living presence of Christ within us. This is my daily challenge as a priest and the challenge for each of us in our very hectic and busy lives at home and in our workplaces.

Along with Pope Benedict, we must ask ourselves daily whether our Christian faith is "'performative' for us—is it a message which shapes our life in a new way, or is it just 'information' which, in the meantime, we have set aside and which now seems to us to have been superseded by more recent information" (SS 10)? In that same encyclical, *Saved by Hope*, the Pope answers beautifully:

Christianity was not only "good news"—the communication of a hitherto unknown content. In our language we would say: the Christian message was not only "informative" but "performative." That means:

the Gospel is not merely a communication of things that can be known—it is one that makes things happen and is life-changing. (SS 2)

But how?

It happens through daily encounters with the living God within us. Our challenge is to be in regular communication, regular touch with him in our prayer, in our study, in our sacramental encounters, in our concern and love for the poor, in our sacrifices for one another, in our living as Jesus lived and continues to live. It is another name for grace—that life in Christ and the inner presence of the Holy Spirit. “The grace that comes to us from Christ in the Spirit is as essential as love and rules and, in fact, makes love and keeping the rules possible” (*USCCA* 318). In effect, that is the moral life: the faith lived, the subject of this book.

Jesus Christ is the ultimate teacher of the moral life. He ratified the Ten Commandments, adopted them as his own, deepened them, and showed us how each is an example of the love of God or the love of neighbor. Together, they are fundamental to the moral life. Speaking of the Ten Commandments as the love of God and neighbor and their relationship to Christ, Pope Benedict said in a homily on Palm Sunday, 2010, that “the Ten Commandments read in a new and deeper way beginning with Christ are part of this love. These commandments are nothing other than the basic rules of true love” (March 28, 2010). In addition, the Beatitudes are taught by Jesus, and they “give spirit to the law of the Ten Commandments and bring perfection to the moral life” (*USCCA* 309).

All three of the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) contain the story of the rich young man. It is the same text used in that Magna-Carta encyclical on the moral life, *The Splendor of Truth (Veritatis Splendor)*. It is also used in the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* at the beginning of Part III, "Christian Morality: The Faith Lived" (USCCA 307).

In Matthew 19:16–22 we read that "someone approached" Jesus and asked him a question. We have no idea who that someone is. No name is given, although we learn later in the text that it is a young man. It is probably just as well that we do not know initially who it is. It could be you or I. So put yourself in that scene right now. Try and ask Jesus the same question: "Teacher, what good must I do to gain eternal life?" Is this even the kind of question you would raise today? When was the last time you thought about eternal life? Most of us are focused, perhaps unduly, on the pressing demands of the here and now with our iPhones and BlackBerrys, voice mails and faxes. Various habits of successful time management have been ingrained in us.

How does Jesus answer the question? He says directly: "There is only One who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments." He does not list rules and regulations, at least initially. No, he speaks of the good. "The good is belonging to God, obeying him, walking humbly with him in doing justice and in loving kindness" (VS 11).

Almost immediately, Jesus tells the young man to keep the commandments. As if to appropriate the Jewish law, Jesus summarizes the commandments and makes them his own: "You shall not murder; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not bear false witness;

honor your father and your mother; also, you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (VS 13). When the rich young man told Jesus he had done all of that, Jesus told him to live the love command in its most radical form—go sell what you have and give to the poor. The commandments "are the *first necessary step on the journey towards freedom*, its starting point " (VS 13). Only then did Jesus say: "Come, follow me."

I learned a most significant lesson from *The Splendor of Truth*, the same lesson that Jesus was trying to teach the rich young man. The moral life for a Christian is not simply about rules and regulations, as important and indeed essential as the Ten Commandments are. Fundamentally, the moral life is about life in Christ Jesus, about following him and living in him. This is made possible first of all because of our Baptism into him and by all the graces that flow from him—from the sacraments, from our prayer, and from our lives of service. No mere human effort alone succeeds in our fulfilling the law, no matter how hard we try. "This fulfillment can come only from a gift of God: the offer of a share in the divine Goodness revealed and communicated in Jesus. . . . What the young man now perhaps only dimly perceives will in the end be fully revealed by Jesus himself in the invitation: 'Come, follow me'" (VS 11).

The Ten Commandments give us guidance and make it possible for us to know the truth as he gives the truth to us. And Jesus teaches us that "the truth will set you free" (Jn 8:32). In his very person, Jesus *is* the Splendor of Truth. And Jesus came not to destroy the law, the law of Moses, but to fulfill it. He fulfilled the law precisely in and through his very person. In his dying, rising, and sending the Holy Spirit, he sends his life and

his love to us. He pours his love in us by the power of the Holy Spirit that enables us to live as he teaches us.

The Christian life is thus about a love affair with the person Jesus. The rules and regulations of that relationship are a part of a covenant first given to the Israelites in the Ten Commandments (or Decalogue) on Mount Sinai. It was a covenant relationship, which set them free from their oppressors and gave them a new way of living. All the more did Christ give you and me a new way of living and loving in and through him and our daily relationship with him. In Baptism, you and I were freed from the slavery and inheritance of sin and made sharers in his life, a life destined for life eternal, a life of hope.

In his homily preached in Rome on June 11, 2010, at the closing of the Year for Priests, Pope Benedict succinctly summarizes that profound relationship between the Ten Commandments and Christ himself: "The people of Israel continue to be grateful to God because in the Commandments he pointed out the way of life. The great Psalm 119 (118) is a unique expression of joy for this fact: we are not fumbling in the dark. God has shown us the way and how to walk aright." Importantly, for us as followers of Christ, Pope Benedict states: "The message of the Commandments was synthesized in the life of Jesus and became a living model. Thus we understand that these rules from God are not chains, but the way which he is pointing out to us. We can be glad for them and rejoice that in Christ they stand before us as a lived reality. He himself has made us glad. By walking with Christ, we experience the joy of Revelation, and as priests we need to communicate to

others our own joy at the fact that we have been shown the right way of life.”

This is a challenge for priests and for all followers of Jesus as we seek to spell out the New Evangelization in a world seeking more and more the implications of the Gospel for our time. Those who have hope and faith live differently. The difference is not always apparent, and therein lies our daily challenge—to make the joy of our life in him more and more visible.

In the following chapters, I will follow a three-pronged approach in my analysis of each of the commandments:

1. What was the Jewish understanding of the commandment? Through a description of the text, I will examine how the commandment spoke to the ancient Israelites.
2. What effect did the Christ event have on the commandment in question? How did Christ fulfill it? The Sermon on the Mount will be helpful here. For example, the fifth commandment states: “You shall not kill.” What Jesus says goes much further: “Everyone who grows angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment.” There are many other examples of the effect of the Christ event.
3. What are some practical and pastoral implications of each commandment in our lives today? The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*; the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*; and two books by Alfred McBride, O. Praem., *The Ten Commandments: Sounds of Love from Sinai* and *The Ten Commandments: Covenant of Love*, will assist us here.

Reflect

1. What is one way, because of your faith, that you seek to live differently?
2. What steps do you take to inform your conscience when you are facing a difficult moral decision? How do you sort through the influence of popular culture and the media on the formation of your conscience?
3. St. Paul said, "I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me." What do these words mean in your life?

Pray

O Lord, give me a mind
that is humble, quiet, peaceable,
patient and charitable,
and a taste of your Holy Spirit
in all my thoughts, words, and deeds.

O Lord, give me a lively faith, a firm hope,
a fervent charity, a love of you.

Take from me all lukewarmness in
meditation

and all dullness in prayer.

Give me fervor and delight in thinking of
you,

your grace, and your tender compassion
toward me.

Give me, good Lord,
the grace to work for
the things we pray for.

—St. Thomas More