

Introduction to Christian Morality ‘You and the Catholic Church’ Monday,
April 12, 2010 7:00 PM SMMP Upper Room

First of all, **Christian morality is really rooted in what is.** Now that may sound simplistic; it may sound obvious, but it’s something we don’t think about. This is, of course, a Catholic viewpoint; it’s the viewpoint of St. Thomas Aquinas. Morality, what we do, what we ought to do, is rooted in what is. **The law of God is given to us to describe to us what is so that we can be in cooperation with and in sympathy with being.**

Now one of the things that we have to say at the very beginning, which is again a truth we don’t think about very often, and that is this: really and truly only God is—**only God really is.** Now this is an insight of St. Thomas Aquinas. He developed what is called metaphysics or ontology, and it became overnight a success, except by the end of the Middle Ages it had passed away because people started thinking in a more modern way, where being is simply the most common word we could use for every thing and apply the same basic meaning to everything. But Aquinas said, no, that’s wrong. When we say “God is,” we are saying something totally different from saying I am or the floor is or a bird is, because **when we say “God is” we are speaking about something which necessarily must be.**

Now if you think about St. John’s statement: “God is love”—which is the theme of one of the early encyclicals of the pope, I think the first one of Pope Benedict, “God is Love”—that means **love must be.** It cannot not be. **God cannot not be.** But we can not be; we are conditional. **We are created by the free will of God, and we don’t have to exist at all.** So when we say, “God is,” we are saying something that is unique to God. God is and only God really is; only God necessarily is; only God must be. **All other beings are creatures of God, and as creatures of God belong to God and can only exist in God.** So St. Paul says, “In God we breathe and move and have our being.” This is true in a very literal way. This is not poetry. We do breathe and move and have our being in God, and without God we would not have any being whatsoever, and nothing could exist.

Now we are endowed as human creatures with free will. Now free will can give us an illusion of independence. We are independent, but only in our wills. We are not independent in our being. We cannot create ourselves. We cannot cause ourselves to be. We cannot sustain ourselves in being. And what we actually can do and do do is **we use our free will to pretend that we are independent.** That is pretense. It is actually a form of hypocrisy, that we pretend we are free and we can do as we please. Well, in a sense we can in one sense, but the only reason we can do as we please is that **God sustains us in doing as we please,** so much so that St. Thomas says that when we sin, even when we go against the will of God, it is God who actually accomplishes the evil. Now this sounds odd, and people think: well, how can that be? Well, his argument is very clear. Without God nothing can happen, nothing can be. **God so loves us that he would rather cooperate with evil hoping that we will change than negate our being,** than annihilate our being. God does not want to do that and does not do that.

However, when we pretend to be independent **we create an enormous disorder** in our own lives, and this disorder does not stay contained in our own lives; **it spreads**. This is the idea of sin spreading disorder throughout the world. What sin does is it creates a distorted and deceitful, a false way of being. And it's one we can get used to because the nature of evolution, the way human life has evolved, is to survive and to adapt itself. And so **our natural ability to adapt ourselves, allows us to adapt ourselves to a false way of thinking and being**. And this is what the Bible calls "**sin**," a false way of thinking and being, which leads, of course, to a false way of doing, a **deliberate and voluntary attempt to be independent of God, to act on our own purposes toward our own ends**.

Now human beings are created in the image of God; therefore we must—and Aquinas is very clear about this—**we must seek the good**. We are impelled to seek the good; we are compelled to seek the good. But **we are capable of deceiving ourselves about what's good** and we are capable of deceiving others. If you notice, when Jesus does refer to the **devil he calls him the "father of lies."** That means the source of deception. The work of the devil, if you will, is to deceive, to fool people, so to speak.

The only true source of knowledge about what is good and what is evil is God. Now what is really evil? Well, actually there is no evil; God never created any evil. But **everything that is good is good for something, and it's God who knows what it is good for. Evil is simply a misuse of what is good or an abuse of what is good**.

Now God knows exactly what is good and, therefore, in the story in the Book of Genesis about how sin entered human life, what it portrays is Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, a garden in which they don't have to work and don't have to toil, and they don't have to worry, and they don't have anxieties at all; their lives are perfectly happy, and yet **they don't really want to let God guide them in their choices**. This was, quote, "the deal," or if you want to call it the "covenant," that here is everything for you, only you have to let me guide your life. And this one stipulation—they were not willing to go along with it. Of course, we know that the story is a story, but it's a story that has a great deal of meaning in it.

It shows that **the fundamental moral flaw in the human nature is distrust; it's distrust of God's guidance, and it's a distrust of God's love**. So it's pictured there in the story with a serpent who said, "Oh, you know, God doesn't want you to know good from evil because then you will be equal to God, and that's what he doesn't want. He doesn't want you to be equal to him. And that is exactly what Eve believes: that God does not really will her good but, rather, wants to keep her down. And therefore she becomes a rival of God. And that's a very good concept to **understand sin as rivalry**. Why? Because **it's rejecting God's guidance and God's, you might say, overall mastery of the creation**.

Now what happens in this rivalry is that **human beings become alienated from themselves and from God**, which is inseparable. If they become alienated from God, they become alienated from each other. They can't have one and not the other. God is the other. And **since they cannot relate in truth anymore to the other, who is God, who is the other, they can't relate anymore either with each other**, because each other is an

image of God. And since they can't deal with the reality, they can't deal with the image either. And so creation then falls into disarray.

We have in psychology a very useful concept called the “ego.” **The ego is an idea that we form about who we are.** We might think of that. We form an idea of who we are. Where does the idea come from? Well, **it comes from our experience, and it's connected to all kinds of feelings and we could even say desires.** Fundamentally, our desires are very natural. We have certain fundamental needs and desires such as a need for food, a need for water, a need for shelter, and so on. But human beings, being made in the image of God, **can create needs they don't have**, and these needs can become attached to—they are not real needs, but they are now desires—**and they can be attached also to our idea of who we are.**

This “who we are” is different from person to person; **everyone is different.** One of the most different things about people, which we don't always know, is **to what degree do we really feel alienated from God or alienated from life.** People who don't even believe in God—they still are or are not alienated from life, from mother and father, sisters and brothers, and neighbors, and so on. Since our relation with God cannot stay in a relation with God, it has to spread out and become part of our relation with everyone.

So to what degree are we alienated from God? The idea in Christianity is that **we are all somewhat alienated, except for the Blessed Mother**, who is conceived without sin. The Immaculate Conception is a preservation from alienation in the Blessed Mother's understanding of who she was. But it was an unusual creation on God's part, done for the sake of his divine plan, not really done for her sake. It was done for the sake of his divine plan.

But even besides the Blessed Mother there are many children who grow up with very little sense of alienation, a sense of closeness to God. And St. Augustine talks about that, and he says they are chosen; they are elect. They are brought by the grace of God closer even as small children. Other people are not, for reasons that are completely beyond our ability to question or wonder about. It's simply an observation. It seems to be the case. But the fundamental problem applies to everybody. **Even saints have a problem with trusting in God.** Only the Blessed Mother always trusted in God.

Now faith is the proper antidote to distrust. The primary meaning of faith is to trust in God, and not only in God, but in **God's providence, in his way of working in our lives.** So St. Thomas Aquinas, again, says—you hear me quoting him a lot because he was my more or less favorite theologian. My friends in the seminary used to say that I was one of the greatest minds that came out of the Middle Ages. I didn't find much to admire about modern philosophy, so that's my personal viewpoint. It may have a lot to say about it; I never found much in it. One thing St. Thomas says is that whether a person believes in God or not is not the issue. He says **for a person to be saved a person really has to believe in divine providence.** Now that is a very wise point. Why? Because if you believe in divine providence, **you can cooperate with it.** If you don't believe in divine providence at all, what do you cooperate with? So that's a point we can just reflect on. So faith then involves this **basic trust in God and in God's ways and in God's timing.**

That is a problem for a lot of people. They don't like God's timing. They want God's providential care shown for them right now—it's got to be right now! But that's not always the way it is.

Yesterday we had the **Divine Mercy Sunday**. I don't know if you are familiar with the nun, Sister Faustina, who is really the origin of that celebration. She promoted the Chaplet of Divine Mercy. One of Sister Faustina's, you might say, one of her visions, if you want to call it that, was that God saves many people in their moment of death, that **God is very merciful and that God stays with people until the very moment of their death and enables them to finally accept him as the last thing they do in life**. And she says this is true of many very even evil people. God stays with them and allows them, enables them, to accept him even at the very last moment of their lives. And there are others—there is another mystic, visionary, Blessed Catherine Emmerich—Pope John Paul beautified her—she has an idea that some people even at the moment of their death really don't accept God, but can later. No one ever believed that in the history of tradition, so that's a new idea, but apparently the pope thought it was okay to believe that.

But what it is really is discussing the understanding of how **the love of God can work even in the most hardened hearts**. And I think all of these teachings, all of these visions, play a role. But I think what's important for us is to see how **we need to get on to God's plan and accept his ways**. And this entails really surrender; **it entails a surrender to God's care and love**. So you can't really talk about Christian morality without talking about surrendering to God's love.

And in the past there were scholastics who used to have different categories. They would say, well, morality is over here—we will talk about laws. And over here we will talk about faith. Well, you can't. And the new Catechism states this very well because it shows how—you can get it with the **first commandment**, for example, how the first commandment in a Christian viewpoint is not simply prohibiting something, which it is in the actual law; in terms of Exodus 19 it's prohibiting the worship of false gods and the making of images and the worshiping of images. But **in the Christian idea** it is more than that. **It's requiring the person to seek God and to find faith**. So it's a positive force in life. And **that is the basis of our morality, that we seek God and seek to please God. So we cannot separate faith from morality**.

The results of sin are detailed in biblical stories: death, disorder, the inability to get along with different people. All are sprouting from the seeds of distrust, suspicion of God, that become generalized and universalized into the general public, especially the other: the other person, the other tribe, the other nation. And then we have our own **individual sense of who I am often indistinguishable from a particular group or tribe**. And this is a very basic problem in human life even today, where tribalism is really one of the fundamental obstacles to harmony in the world, where many things done supposedly in the name of God are really not; they are really done in the name of a tribe, although may not be so named. But it's tribal thinking and it's tribal identity behind this “who.”

God makes a **covenant** with his chosen people. This is the story of the Exodus. Actually it's the story of Abraham, but which then leads to Exodus, although some say it's the other way around, but I don't want to get into that. The idea of the covenant is **God forms a bond with a certain people** who are now going to become his ambassadors, so to speak, **his model of what life is supposed to be, and therefore the covenant has ethical stipulations.**

We often talk about the ten commandments, actually it's one commandment and nine prohibitions. But don't forget, they are laws in the true strict sense. A law is particular—a law is particular. It only binds specific people at specific times to do or not to do specific things. So **the law originally is specific.** The purpose of it is **to provide a certain form of justice within the society so that this people could be a model people for the whole world.** That's the idea. Of course, it doesn't work, as we know, because it's widely **ignored, especially in times of prosperity.** Idolatry becomes rampant especially in the north where the land is very rich and the people are very prosperous and they worship prosperity for all intents and purposes, symbolized by golden calves and the god Baal. Now the word "baal" actually means "lord," but the idea of Baal is really the god that makes you rich by giving you flocks and crops.

Now the **prophets** come and they say, well, this isn't working, so God will bring a new covenant about, and this **new covenant will be written in the heart of the human person.** And **Christ fulfills that covenant and renews it in his own blood.** This is what we just celebrated in a very solemn way with the Passover of the Lord from Thursday evening, Holy Thursday evening, to the Vigil and inclusive. His resurrection inaugurates a new creation, and **we now have a living model for our life,** a model of flesh and blood, yet not living any more on our earth, but transformed in the glory of the resurrection. But this very life that he gained becomes the possession, if you want to use that word, of the Christian community in Baptism. And **Baptism is celebrated as a rebirth, as beginning from above something new, spirit begetting spirit.**

However, following Christ has not become an automatic mechanical process. This it seems some people expected: that everything would be very simple; it would just follow through; there would be no problems; it would be automatic. Well, not really. In fact, it's **a conscious process of putting on Christ, and it is often in conflict with what people have been in the past** or what other people are since we are relational creatures, social creatures. And the whole history of the human race is really contained in our bodies physically. So the habits, the **bad habits,** if you want to call it that, the bad ways of living that are contrary to the will of God and lead to disharmony and disunity and so on, those very habits **are really already in our psyches and in our bodies—we inherit them.** And this inheritance **St. Augustine calls "original sin,"** although he understood it strictly physically. We don't understand it physically today. But it is partly physical in the sense that the genetic code does copy things. How all this works, no one is quite sure. This is an area of great exploration in the future.

Anyway the tendencies of human nature that have become very embedded will change only very slowly and only after serious struggle. The weakness and the proneness to sin, what St. Paul calls the "old man"—it's not a sexist term in Greek. Man is *anthropos* not

aner. It just means the old human being. The old human being as St. Paul calls it is still with us, and in Latin this is now called “concupiscence.” It’s not a bad word to know—concupiscence. **Concupiscence is the proneness to disorder, the proneness to disharmony within the human make up.**

Now under the influence of the Spirit, Christians form good moral habits. According to St. Thomas they are actually—first of all, **Faith, Hope, and Love are given as gifts in Baptism. The moral virtues are infused at Baptism. In Confirmation the Gifts of the Holy Spirit are given as gifts.** And the grace given by God creates what is called a habit. This habit is called “**sanctifying grace**” or “**habitual grace,**” and it means that it makes it **second nature for us to please God, to follow divine providence, to cooperate with the will of God.**

However, like all habits it takes some getting used to. Let’s say you have a child who is very talented—great. And you buy him—I’ll say “him” for an example—you buy him a violin. Does he become a Jascha Heifetz by sitting watching television? No, he has to practice the violin. That’s how a habit is formed. So the fact that God gives us these gifts and these graces—it’s a beautiful gift, like having a violin—now we have to play it. And that is the struggle of the Christian life because it’s never easy to play a violin—Is it, Barb? No, no. **And it’s not easy to practice the virtues which God actually gives us as gifts, but they are really not ours until we practice.** So that making our own the virtues God gives us—that is the work of **Christian spirituality or Christian morality.** And they cannot be separated. Again, in the past morality was separated from faith; morality was separated from spirituality. This is a terrible mistake. They have to all go together.

Now the moral virtues infused were **Prudence**, which means shrewdness; **Temperance**, which is an ability to guard oneself against one’s own internal excesses: food, drink, anger, whatever—to control that; Temperance—**Justice** to seek balance in all things; **Courage, Fortitude**, strength to counteract one’s own inner weaknesses, one’s tendency to buckle under pressure, one’s tendency not to upset people even when what they are doing is wrong—this is the virtue of Courage or Fortitude. Prudence is actually practical wisdom to actually know in any individual situation what is the right thing to do, because it’s not a matter of simply having a law, especially ten measly commandments, but you need the gift of Prudence. As St. Thomas says, it is infused at our Baptism, but we have to learn how to use it, how to employ it.

Bad moral habits are called “**vices**”; the modern word is “character defects.” So the modern word for a vice is a character defect; it’s a **bad habit, and it is the result of resisting the Spirit**, although sometimes it’s really easy to resist the Spirit; it’s not like you really have to push very hard; no, it’s very easy. Sometimes, however, bad habits or even just simply wrong decisions, wrong actions, come about because of the **clouding of our judgment because we are deceived about what is good.** We choose a good, but it’s not a real good. Or because **our freedom has been restricted**, and this restriction St. Thomas deals primarily with what he calls the “**passions.**” What are the passions? I will talk about them in a minute.

But modern psychiatry and psychology and psychotherapy have uncovered even more problems than St. Thomas even knew about, which are called “mental illnesses” or “mental disorders” or they have different words. They all belong to what we could call, which is called in the Bible, the “flesh.” **The flesh simply means—it doesn’t mean the body. The flesh means the human person not yet influenced by the Spirit. So we have flesh and Spirit. The human person—one under the influence of God, the other not quite yet.**

Traditionally the primary passions are called “deadly sins.” Some call them vices. A vice is simply a habit, an evil habit, bad habit. First is **anger**, or in the Catechism it’s called “**wrath**,” because it has to do with a violent or sudden temper that can be destructive. The second is **pride**, and this—*superbia* in Latin—does not mean self-esteem. We are supposed to have self-esteem. We are not supposed to have pride in this sense of feeling superior to others and treating others as inferiors—that’s the sin of pride. Now mystics use the word “pride” sometimes in a different way, to mean self-love itself or self-will. When St. John of the Cross says pride is the basis of all sin, he doesn’t mean this feeling of superiority; he means self-love itself, the motivation of pleasing yourself and not pleasing God, in other words, the rivalry I spoke about in the beginning. So sometimes that’s called “pride.” That might be found in other mystics as well.

Some authors like Mother Nadine, who lives out in Nebraska, Mother Nadine adds **vanity** to the list of deadly sins. Vanity is a very interesting thing. It’s very similar to pride, but it’s a preoccupation with appearances: how I look and how other people take me. It’s not really concerned about who I am inside. So we see a lot of vanity in the New Testament when Christ talks about cleaning the outside of the cup and leaving the inside full of loot and lust—that’s an example of vanity. And there are many cases where he talks about the outside appearance versus the inner reality—hypocrisy is vanity

Envy, envy is in a sense in contrast to pride. Pride is a feeling of superiority; envy is the feeling of inferiority. That is not virtuous to feel inferior. That’s an insult to God. He made everyone uniquely excellent. And if you don’t accept your own excellence, that is a vice; that is a trap. We can use that word too. Envy always works with comparison to others: I don’t really turn out so well in regards to somebody else—that type of thing.

Avarice is a feeling of security based on having—it’s a feeling of security based on having: having things, having money, having possessions. It is different from **greed**. Greed goes along with **gluttony**. Gluttony is never having enough—greed is never having enough: food, money, whatever. **Lust**, another deadly trap, is pleasure for its own sake, self-centered pleasure, taking rather than pleasure-giving. It is often associated with sex, but it is not the only way in which lust works. **Sloth** is indifference to what is objectively good and, therefore, an inattentiveness, a disinterest in being. Those are the traps. And we should add **distrust** because distrust is the first one, the trap that got us into the trap in the first place.

Now we could add to this list also what modern psychiatry calls impulsive, histrionic, narcissistic, dependent, borderline, suspicious, unpredictable, or exploitive qualities. The trouble is, the sad thing is, some of these yield to treatment and some don’t. Therefore it

is often the **goal of the Christian moral life to gain control of the passions because not only are they a trap that cloud our vision and cloud our freedom or restrict our freedom, but they are also a motivation to do what is bad.** So there is a double whammy there. I don't really see what's wrong because I am already engaged. This is what St. Thomas calls *concupiscentia antecedens*—antecedent concupiscence. It means it's there before you are; before you are conscious anger is there already, lust is there already; sloth is there already; pride is there already. And that clouds your vision and weakens your will, to what degree no one can say; St. Thomas doesn't say, but to some degree, and motivates you to do prideful, angry, lustful things, breaking, of course, the commandments, which are against all these disordered behaviors.

So that is why very much of the Christian moral life is gaining control of the passions. As St. Thomas says, there is a good thing to every passion. Another thing he says is *in medio stat virtus*—**in the middle stands the virtue.** See, for example, the virtue of humility—you have the virtue of humility—that's the middle. Then on one extreme we have pride in the sense I used it before, *superbia*, arrogance; and on the other side you have shame. Now there are actually disorders—in some people it's not a common deadly sin, but some people actually have an enormous amount of shamefulness; they live out of a very shameful place and that is not humility. Some people think, oh, you are so humble. Well, no, they are not; they are just very shameful, that is, they are ashamed of themselves. That is not good. What's good is humility, which is truthfulness. *Humus* means earth. We walk on the earth. We are who we are, but we are creatures of God. The very thing that makes us depend upon God is also our glory because God created us. We wouldn't exist without God. So on the one hand, it's a warning that you need to be aware of God and listen to God and let God guide you; but on the other hand, it also says you are really God's children. You are God's child. You wouldn't exist if God didn't love you.

See the Catechism for the section on moral law.

Response to Questions

In the bulletin announcing this presentation there were questions.

“What do Catholics mean by being ‘Pro-Life’ with respect to women’s bodies?”

“If people love each other, why can't they have sex before marriage?”

“God loves everyone, so what is wrong with homosexuality?”

Well, it's best to deal with all this in one topic, and that is that the Christian tradition, first of all, is based on the Jewish. The **ten commandments were Jewish laws**, and what **Jesus** did is he spiritualized them; that means he **made them more interior and he made them more universal as a principle as opposed to a law.** So in the Old Testament it says: “Do not commit adultery.” And someone who did was to be stoned. The penalty for all the violations of the ten commandments was stoning. And in regard to the first commandment, that was the total annihilation of the family to the third and fourth generation. So it was a very harsh but strict, harsh and strict, form of law.

Now what Christ did is he talked about **the meaning of law**. When the woman was caught in adultery he said, “Go, but sin no more. I do not condemn you.” But in regard to the actual question of adultery he said, well, “The law says. ‘Do not commit adultery,’ but I say any man who looks with lust upon a woman is already guilty of adultery.” So he is bringing it inward; he is making it **a matter of interior disposition**. So it’s not merely a matter of an act committed in the world; it’s a matter of **an act or a choice entertained within one’s consciousness**. So that’s the first thing to keep in mind.

So purity now is not simply a matter of blood, which is the whole idea of adultery in the Old Testament. It was that a man’s wife should have only his children. Jesus changes this and, first of all, **universalizes it**. This is not really a matter for here and now; it’s a matter of principle, that a man and a woman are meant for each other. In the beginning it was not the way it is now. He often did that. He said “In the beginning it was,” showing that even the idea of law has been lost in the tradition, because actually it’s obvious that the Jewish law underwent a lot of changes, a lot of evolution, a lot of development. So when he says, “In the beginning it was not thus,” he is saying that **the original plan of God was for man and woman to be partners, to be companions, to be in a sense dependent on each other in a mutual way**. And so that’s how he looks at marriage. He says, “Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife.”

So the Church has understood this to mean that **the purpose of sexuality is to bring together man and wife in this relationship. So anything outside of it is not acceptable**. That’s the traditional understanding. So premarital sex is not acceptable because there is no marriage. Homosexually it is not acceptable because it isn’t a man and a woman coming together. Now people say this is unfair because, well, some people are born with this tendency and they can’t help it or whatever. Whether this is true or not, I do not know and I cannot speak to it. All I can say is what the Church teaches.

What is Pro-Life? Well, the whole idea of life is life is a gift from God. And if we respect sexuality, then we have to respect also the life that it brings about. So **life is sacred from the moment it comes into being**. So, I mean, it’s really very simple. So that’s these three questions.

Question about anger and killing.

For example, “Do not kill.” Jesus says, “The law says, ‘Do not kill,’ but I say anyone who is angry is guilty of murder.” Now there may be a little bit of exaggeration in that, but the point is very good, that anger can kill. And so if you really want to be a man of peace, you cannot give in to anger. You have to manage your anger. You have to deal with your anger. And it isn’t simply a clever anger management class; it’s a matter of bringing it to God and surrendering it to God. And that’s true with **all the passions. They all have to be surrendered to God**. Now I do not know enough about these mental issues, these illnesses, disorders, I don’t know how they respond to prayer and grace—I don’t know. I think they might help a little, but maybe they are so imbedded in the nature of the person or their physical—I don’t really know. I would think they might need extra help, perhaps medication—I don’t know.

Question about living together.

A lot of people believe that it's all right just to live together. Now are they really **committed to each other? Is it a common law marriage?** Well, if they are really committed to each other in a common law marriage, then in the natural order you could say it's a kind of a marriage. But if there is no commitment, then, no, then it's not a marriage in any way.

Within our Catholic community **we don't allow it because it's not the way we understand God's will.** But I am just saying that outside of our community it is possible because, see, we also don't allow people to live together who are married in a Lutheran church. We don't consider that a true marriage if they are Catholic. That's our teaching. Two Catholics cannot live together after having been married in a Lutheran church. If they were married and they become Catholic, that's different. We don't say that Lutherans aren't married! Of course they are married. And atheists are married too, but not according to our laws. But for us, we don't allow marriage before a Justice of the Peace. We don't allow marriage before a Lutheran minister without permission from the Bishop.

Question about steps in making a moral decision

When you have a particular decision to make, you need to pray about it. But in general formation of conscience—you can't do it every time you have a decision. **You need to form your conscience as an ongoing thing.** And the best way is really through **Scripture.** Scripture is the most primary way because it's the teachings of Christ that teach us the heart of God as Christ knew it. So if you want to be Christian, that's the way to go, without condemning people who don't go that way. We should not be in the business of condemning people who disagree with Christ's way. He didn't; he didn't condemn people.

Question about God helping us sin by keeping us in being

He actually goes along with causing it in a sense because of freedom. I mean, if he gives us free will, and we choose to use it, well, he can't pull us back and say, well, nope, you can't do that. And you see, **everything depends on God.** That's just something people don't get. It's just impossible for them to understand. So he says, yes, even that depends on God.

Question about salvation

Calvinists think God has chosen from all eternity who is going to be saved, and those that weren't chosen were reprobated, meaning he didn't bother giving them grace. Now some say he just chose to do that because he was sovereign and he could do it; and others say, well, he knew that they wouldn't want it anyway. But that's not our view. In fact, in the Roman Mass, the first Eucharistic Prayer, it says **we pray that we will be counted among the chosen.** Well, Calvin would have thought that was a ridiculous prayer. How can you pray to be among the chosen? Well, we believe it. We can be chosen. We can pray to be chosen. Why not? **If we want to be chosen, then God wants to choose us.**

God wants the salvation of all. That's a statement in Lumen Gentium. Lumen Gentium is the only dogmatic constitution of Vatican II. It says that **the Catholic Church teaches that God wills the salvation of all people, and has provided for it since the time of Adam**, which means that Calvin is wrong, which means that—and you know what, a lot of the real rightwing Catholics that broke away from the Church said because they didn't like the Mass in English, or vernacular; really they didn't like Lumen Gentium, in my opinion. That embarrassed them because they wanted to think that they are the only ones in heaven, or whatever. Lumen Gentium says that God desires the salvation of all people and has provided for it since the time of Adam. So **the salvation of Christ goes backward in time and forward in time; it incorporates all of time**. The general tradition was that those people who died before Christ but in the state of righteousness through faith because they accepted God's grace, they were kept in a waiting room called the "bosom of Abraham," in the pit, in the Sheol, and that Jesus when he died, "descended into hell," into Hades, into Sheol, and took them up with him to meet the Father. That's the idea.

Question about guiding children and grandchildren

First of all, it's really important to **pray about it first** and to see how the Catholic view has—how you have appreciated it, how it has helped you in your life. So **you present it as a witness, that this has really helped me, and this is what I found to be truly light; this has enlightened my life**. That's how I would do it. Now are they all going to be impressed? Not necessarily right now, but you would be surprised what they might really think. But, you know, our world is so goofy and our society is so goofy, I mean, and they absorb it—like they just absorb that stuff. That is part of our nature, to absorb the world around us and to adapt to it. That's one of the problems.