



Adult Faith Formation



What do you think of when you hear the word “morality”? The term can evoke a variety of images. Many people today imagine a thundering set of “thou shalt not’s” raining down from Heaven. Others might imagine a censorious priest or nun wagging a finger while giving a lecture. Still others will see it as being a set of demands placed upon us which take away from our freedom, coming perhaps from faith or from a personal feeling of obligation or of guilt. Many of these images make it difficult to think about morality, and problematic to have conversations about it with others. After all, if morality is just a matter of faith, how can we find common ground in talking about it with people who don’t share our faith? If it really is a set of demands or obligations which make us less free, isn’t it wrong for us to try to impose that upon other people, especially if they’re not harming anyone?

The Catholic view of morality is very different from these images. God in his wisdom and in his love made us according to a particular design, and there are ways of acting and of being which are good for us because of the way that we’re made. We can think of ourselves as being like a Chevrolet. Because of the way the car is made, there are certain things that are good for it and others that are bad for it. We can know what is good for the car by listening to the people who made it; the car comes with directions from its maker which tell us how to take good care of it. We can experience a sense of obligation in taking care of our cars, but at the end of the day we do it not because there’s some arbitrary rule about when to go to the shop or get an oil change, but because we want them to do the good things they’re designed to do. And while it is a great help to have an authority like the owner’s manual to guide you, it’s possible to think and talk about what’s good for the car even if you’ve lost the manual or never bought one.

We can see this same sort of dynamic play out on the physical level; because of the design of our bodies, some actions conduce to health and others to sickness. Just like caring for the car requires that we do what’s good for it, so loving our bodies sometimes requires us to exercise, avoid unhealthy habits, and listen to our doctors. These things might sometimes be difficult or uncomfortable, and they might seem like restrictions on our freedom, but at the end of the day they are things we do out of love for ourselves and for others, so that just like the car we might be able to do those good things proper to our nature. In doing what is good for our bodies, we find a greater amount of real freedom: we can live longer and healthier lives. And while a respect for peoples’ autonomy and privacy precludes us from constantly lecturing them about their health, love sometimes compels us to tell a loved one that he needs to make it to the doctor or to quit smoking or to lose some weight.

But man is not merely a physical being like a car. He is also a spiritual being, a rational creature with the power to choose and to think, to know and to love. These parts of himself are also created according to a particular order, with a particular way of acting and being which is healthy and good, and with other ways of acting and being which are destructive. In order to understand morality, one must understand what sort of creature man is. As Catholics, we can know this through faith, through the Bible and the teachings of the Church, which are in a sense like the owner’s manual for our Chevrolet. But like with the car, we can also know what sort of thing it is and what’s good for it by using our power of reason; we can talk about it even with people who don’t have the manual. Just like it can be an act of love to encourage a loved one to take care of his body, so it can be an act of love to tell someone to take care of his soul.

Over the next 18 weeks, we’ll be having a series of discussions about morality, about what sort of creature man is and what’s good for him, about how to understand these things ourselves and how to talk about them with others. We’d love for you to join us. This won’t be a “class”, so there’s no need to worry if you miss a few weeks or if you jump in halfway through. The discussion series will employ a series of engaging videos, and also talks by Deacon John, as well as our seminarians Drew and Brian.

Hope to see you there,

Deacon Jon, and our Seminarians, Drew Tanguay and Brian Meinders