

Ten Essential Moral Principles in Catholic Teaching

The following is a summary of ten essential principles of Catholic morality that are found consistently in Catholic moral teaching.

Respect for Human Dignity

Catholics are called to respect, love, and promote human life; and to defend the life, dignity, and rights of all people. Human dignity is the belief that all people have been endowed by God with dignity and deserve respect. It is the belief that everyone has something to offer. The Catholic faith begins with the recognition of the infinite worth of each and every human being – seeing the value and worth of every human being and honoring and respecting the uniqueness of each person. Respect for the dignity of all people leads to defending their human rights – the right to the basics of life (e.g., food, clothing, shelter, education, work) and ensuring that everyone in society works to see that people's basic needs are met.

Respect for Creation and the Environment

Catholics are called to respect, care for, and defend all of creation. We are called to examine how we use and share the goods of the earth, and how we live in harmony with God's creation. Catholics are called to stewardship – the duty or responsibility to use the world's resources responsibly.

Love

Catholics are called to love one another and ourselves. Jesus said that our love for one another is a sign by which others will know that we are his disciples (John 13:34-35). Jesus said that we need to love others as we love ourselves and to remember that we are always loved by God. Catholics are called to love even our enemies. "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ...If you love those who love you," Jesus said, "what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them" (Luke 6:27, 32)

Justice

Catholics are called to actively work to right the wrongs, to balance the indignities, to fight for the good causes, and to bring human dignity into this well-intentioned but imperfect world. Justice means working for human equality and decency by not displaying ignorance or prejudice, by not judging others, by respecting differences, by opposing bias, bigotry, and discrimination. Justice means expanding our care and concern beyond our family and local community to the nation and world.

Care and Compassion

Catholics are called to hear another's cries of anguish, feel another's pain, and respond. Compassion is the experience of feeling the other's life as one's own. One of Jesus' most powerful stories focuses on the call to compassion: the Samaritan looks on the man in the ditch with compassion and responds in a way that no one expects (Luke 10:25-37). Compassion moves us beyond just "feeling" the pain of another, it moves us to action.

Service

Catholics are called to serve one another, humbly and unselfishly. Jesus gave us an example when he washed the feet of his disciples (John 13:4-17). Catholics are called to serve the poor and the powerless – feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless... (Matthew 25). Catholics are called to befriend those whom society looks down upon. Jesus made himself the friend of the outcasts (Matthew 11:19) and did not avoid their company (Mark 2:16).

Forgiveness

Catholics are called to forgive one another and always to seek reconciliation with one another. Jesus said that we cannot ask forgiveness for our own sins unless we are also ready to forgive those who sin against us (Mt. 6:12). Catholics are called to renounce revenge. "If anyone strikes you on the cheek," Jesus said, "offer the other also" (Lk. 6:29).

Peace

Catholics are called to pursue peace and harmony in their personal life, relationships, and world. Peace means reconciling differences and resolving conflicts non-violently, recognizing that differences are seldom resolved through conflict or violence.

Faithfulness

Catholics are called to develop relationships built on loyalty, trust and love that provide intimacy, security, and happiness. Faithfulness in relationships involves respect and commitment between people. Catholics are called to reserve sexual intimacy to the committed relationship of marriage.

Honesty and Integrity

Catholics are called to be honest and genuine with other individuals, institutions, society, and self in every act, deed, and dealing. Honesty grows from an inner strength and confidence that is bred by exacting truthfulness, trustworthiness, and integrity.