

# CATECHETICAL SESSION JUNIOR/SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL LESSON PLAN B

**Theme: Forming Consciences**

## **Gathering**

*The first purpose of the opening of each session is to establish a sense of welcome and hospitality. The second purpose is to begin the session with the young person's experience, i.e. her/his "story" or ideas. Have a Bible prominently enthroned in the room as the centerpiece for prayer and the proclamation of the Word.*

Open the session by asking the students to think about how they form their beliefs about public policy issues like abortion, the death penalty, the environment, taxes, programs to help those who are poor, etc. What do they think went into forming their beliefs about these issues? Write the answers you hear on the dry erase board or on newsprint in the front of the room.

## **Opening Prayer**

Call the group to prayer. After an extended pause, continue with these or similar words:

**Let us pray.**

**Spirit who is always present,**

**We thank you for walking beside us during each moment of our lives.**

**Help us to be attentive to your voice in our hearts.**

**We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

*Students are seated. Catechist takes Bible from enthronement and proclaims reading. Be sure reading is marked in advance.*

## **Scripture Reading & Faith Sharing**

*The catechist makes the transition to this movement by describing that God guides us to be faithful, active disciples by being present in our hearts as we live, pray and act.*

Proclaim the reading (Romans 2:14-16):

### **A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans...**

*For when the Gentiles who do not have the law by nature observe the prescriptions of the law, they are a law for themselves even though they do not have the law. They show that the demands of the law are written in their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even defend them on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge people's hidden works through Christ Jesus.*

After the reading a brief period of silence follows. Then, ask the students these or similar questions:

- What did you hear in the reading? Name the word or phrase you most remember.
- What is Paul saying about the Gentiles?

After the students' initial response, proclaim the reading again.

### **A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans...**

Then ask the following questions:

- What kind of law is Paul talking about in the reading? Is it a law that is part of the legal system? If not, what is it?
- What kind of law is written in the heart?
- Think about the class discussion that opened up the session. Have you had the experience of sensing a "law written in the heart" that helps you know what is right and wrong when you consider different issues? If so, describe your experience.
- How does a person form the ability to choose between right and wrong, both for everyday decisions that affect one's personal life, and in decisions about stances to take on particular issues? How does a person develop the skills and values they need make the right choices?
- What does the word "conscience" mean to you?

## **Faithful Citizenship Reading & Discussion Questions**

*The catechist makes a transition from reflection on the Scripture to discussion on the teaching of the Church. You may want to prepare a handout that includes these quotes, or project them on a PowerPoint slide. Begin by reading the quotes out loud.*

The Church equips her members to address political and social questions by helping them to develop a well-formed conscience. Catholics have a serious and lifelong obligation to form their consciences in accord with human reason and the teaching of the Church. Conscience is not something that allows us to justify doing whatever we want, nor is it a mere "feeling" about what we should or should not do. Rather, conscience is the voice of God resounding in the human heart, revealing the truth to us and calling us to do what is good while shunning what is evil (no. 17).

The formation of conscience includes several elements. First, there is a desire to embrace goodness and truth. For Catholics this begins with a willingness and openness to seek the truth and what is right by studying Sacred Scripture and the teaching of the Church as contained in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. It is also important to examine the facts and background information about various choices. Finally, prayerful reflection is essential to discern the will of God (no. 18).

The Church fosters well-formed consciences not only by teaching moral truth but also by encouraging its members to develop the virtue of prudence, which St. Ambrose described as "the charioteer of the virtues." Prudence enables us "to discern our true good in every circumstance and to choose the right means of achieving it" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1806). Prudence shapes and informs our ability to deliberate over available alternatives, to determine what is most fitting to a specific context, and to act decisively. Exercising this virtue often requires the courage to act in defense of moral principles when making decisions about how to build a society of justice and peace (no. 19)

*- Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States*

The following can be used as discussion questions:

- Now that you have read the passage from Faithful Citizenship, did your definition of "conscience" change? How is conscience more than just a feeling you have?
- Is conscience something that God gives us only to guide the daily decisions in our personal lives, or is there also a public dimension of conscience?
- How could you use the bishops' descriptions of the elements of conscience to help you form your perspectives and beliefs on policy issues?
- What does prudence mean? How does someone develop it?
- Can you think of any times in your own life where you exercised the virtue of prudence in making choices (a) in your personal life, and (b) about issues in the public realm? Describe.

## **Closing Prayer**

*Gather students into a circle with the Bible reverently enthroned in the middle of the circle. Once all have quieted, the catechist walks to the center, picks up the Bible and proclaims Romans 2, verse 15 only. After returning the Bible to its place, continue with prayer.*

**Let us pray.**

**Father of all creation,**

**May we be listen to your voice in our hearts.**

**Help us form our consciences and live as faith disciples who are active in our communities.**

**We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ who live and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. Amen.**