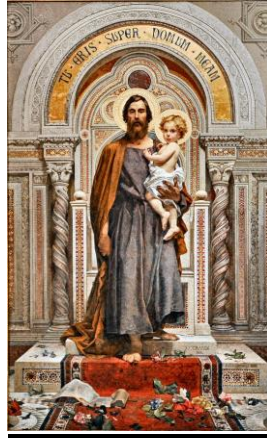


# St. Joseph Society



**Objective:** Catholic morality is the practical outworking of the great dogmas of the Catholic faith. St. Paul commands us to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12-13). Last month, we investigated the end or goal of the Christian life which is happiness with God in heaven. For the remainder of this course, we will discuss how to make good choices that will lead to eternal beatitude. This month, we are going to look at the nature of the human act.

- Unit 1 – Introduction to Moral Theology
- Unit 2 – The Nature of Man
- Unit 3 – The End of Man
- Unit 4 – Making Moral Choices
- Unit 5 – Freedom
- Unit 6 – Conscience

## **Unit 1 Podcast Schedule**

- Episode #13 – Our Last End Depends on our Conduct
- Episode #14 – Humans Acts vs. Acts of Humans
- Episode #15 – The Steps of the Human Act
- Episode #4 – The Morality of Human Acts

## Episode #13 – Our Last End Depends on our Conduct

### I. Introduction

1. Opening Question: Why should getting to heaven depend upon what we do?
2. Last month, we investigated the end or goal of the Christian life which is happiness with God in heaven. We discussed the nature of happiness, considered some non-Christian approaches to happiness, and finished our reflection by discussing supernatural happiness which is the end or goal of every person's life which is called the Beatific Vision.
3. This month, we are going to look at the nature of the human act, and we'll start by discussing the fact that attaining our last end depends upon our conduct, or the choices we make in this life.

### II. Our Last End Depends on our Conduct

1. What is the use of the present life?
  - a. So far, we have seen that man has a last end which is perfect happiness in the possession of God. It is also evident that perfect happiness is not possible in the present life.
  - b. If our last end can be attained only in the next life, it follows that this life is an intermediate end or a means to the last end.
  - c. A means is good insofar as it helps to the end, bad insofar as it hinders from the end.
  - d. The purpose of this life, therefore, is so to conduct ourselves as to make ourselves worthy of the perfect happiness that is offered us in the life to come.
2. Our Last End Depends on Our Conduct
  - a. The wisdom of God demands it.
    - i. Because perfect happiness is the highest good and it is only reasonable that it should be appreciated by those possessing it.
    - ii. It would be unwise to squander it on those who deliberately make themselves unworthy of it, for then God himself would seem not to appreciate the value of the gifts He gives.
  - b. The dignity of man demands it.
    - i. Because man is by nature an intelligent and free being, capable of guiding himself to his destiny under God's providence.
    - ii. If perfect happiness were thrust on man without his will, his highest attributes, intelligence and freedom, would be useless to him for accomplishing the main purpose of his existence.

### 3. Humans Acts vs. Acts of Humans

- a. St. Thomas Aquinas – “Of actions done by man those alone are properly called human which are proper to man as man. Now man differs from irrational animals in that he is master of his actions. Wherefore those actions alone are properly called human of which man is master. Now man is master of his actions through his reason and will, whence too the free will is defined as the faculty and will of reason. Therefore, those actions are properly called human which proceed from a deliberate will. And if any other actions are found in man, they can be called actions of a man, but not properly human actions, since they are not proper to man as man” (ST, I-II, q. 1. a. 1).
- b. Human Acts vs. Acts of Humans – St. Thomas Aquinas makes a distinction between “human action” and “acts of a human being.”
  - i. “Acts of humans” are involuntary acts that one has no rational control of (ex. reflexes, sleep-walking, snoring, etc.) and therefore, have no moral import.
  - ii. “Human acts” are those actions that are performed by human beings voluntarily. “Human acts” are performed after deliberation (knowing and willing).

### III. Application

1. Keep practicing the Rule of Life
2. Meditation – We should meditate on the fact that the things we do in this life matter. In the movie *Gladiator* Russell Crowe’s character Maximus tells his soldiers, “Brothers, what we do in life, echoes in eternity.” From a Christian perspective, this is exactly right. Men, let’s live worthy lives for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ so that he can tell us at the Judgement Seat of Christ, “Well done good and faithful servant” (Mt. 25:23).

## Episode #14 – Ethical Constitution of the Human Act

### I. Introduction

1. Opening Question: What constitutes a human act?
2. Last week, we discussed the fact that our last end depends upon the choices we make. We also talked about the fact that there is a distinction between “human acts” and “acts of humans.”
3. This week, we are going to discuss the ethical constitution of the human act.

### II. Ethical Constitution of the Human Act

1. Ethical Constitution of the Human Act – A human act, or human conduct, has two basic qualities:
  - a. Knowledge
  - b. Freedom
2. Ethical Constitution of the Human Act – Knowledge
  - a. Conduct springs from a motive and is directed to an end.
    - i. The **will** is a blind faculty, a faculty of striving and not of knowing, and cannot act unless enlightened by the intellect.
    - ii. The **intellect** proposes the good and the will tends towards it.
  - b. An act is a human act only insofar as it is known. Any part or circumstance of the act that the doer does not advert to is not attributable to him. For example, a man who steals money not knowing that it is counterfeit is morally guilty of theft, though he gets no profit out of it. Another example would be a sting operation by law enforcement officers.
3. Ethical Constitution of the Human Act – Freedom
  - a. An act which comes from both knowledge and will is called freedom.
  - b. A free act is a willed act, one that neither is forced on a person from without nor arises spontaneously from within.
  - c. Aristotle – “Since that which is done under compulsion or by reason of ignorance is involuntary, the voluntary would seem to be that of which the moving principle is in the agent himself, he being aware of the particular circumstances of the action” (*Nicomachean Ethics*, bk. III, ch. 1, 1111a 22).
  - d. St. Thomas Aquinas – “It is of the nature of a voluntary act that its principle be within the agent, together with some knowledge of the end” (*ST I-II*, q. 6, a. 1-2).

#### 4. Review

- a. What is conduct? It consists of human acts which are consciously controlled and deliberately willed.
- b. A human act has two basic qualities:
  - i. Knowledge points out the end and the means to it.
  - ii. Freedom means that the act is really willed, that it proceeds from the will with a knowledge of the end. Freedom adds to voluntariness the possibility of choice.

#### III. Application

1. Keep practicing the Rule of Life
2. One of the reasons we emphasize study as a part of our rule is to help you think well about God, our world, and your life. We also emphasize the various disciplines to help you become more free. In the final two units of this course, we'll explore this in detail, but I hope you are starting to see these connections.

## Episode #15 – The Steps of the Human Act

### I. Introduction

1. Opening Question: What are the steps of the human act?
2. Last week, we discussed the ethical constitution of the human act which includes knowledge and freedom.
3. This week, we are going to discuss steps of the human act.

### II. The Steps of the Human Act

#### 1. Introduction

- a. Since every moral act proceeds from the powers of intellect and will, we will consider the different parts, or steps, in the progressive completion of a moral act.
- b. Since all moral action is purposive, we shall first consider the end, then the means to the end, and finally the execution of the moral act.
- c. St. Thomas Aquinas – “Now, in the orderly sequence of actions, it is necessary to take up firstly the apprehension of the end, then the appetitive inclinations to the end, then the deliberation concerning the means to the end, and then the appetitive action in regard to these means to the end” (*ST. I-II, q. 15, a. 3*).

Acts of the intellect	Acts of the will
1. Application to a concrete situation	2. Intention (tending toward the good)
3. Deliberation (Counsel)	4. Consent
5. Judgement limiting to one option	6. Choice
7. Command	8. Execution
	9. Delight and Enjoyment

#### 2. Steps Concerned with the End

- a. **Application to a Concrete Situation** – The first step is the understanding that something is desirable for its own sake. It may be that the end will be judged to be impossible of attainment, in which case the agent cannot proceed to do anything more about it. But if judged possible to the agent, then the end so known stimulates a movement of will, which is called intention.
- b. **Intention** – This intention is not yet a free act, for it is a natural and necessary thing to be attracted to what is good for oneself, provided it is thought possible of attainment.

### 3. Steps Concerned with the Means

- a. **Deliberation (counsel)** – The agent discovers and proceeds to evaluate the various means which seem suitable to the attainment of the end, under the actual circumstances which can be known to apply to the problem. Such a process should terminate in a judgement, a definite decision as to what means should be used. This decision may be somewhat theoretical and impersonal at this point.
- b. **Consent** – If the agent is to make personal use of the previous deliberation, he must will to apply this reasoning to himself. This step is called consent.
- c. **Judgement Limiting to One Option** – Deliberation ends in a final judgement determining the choice which the agent completes by a will-act of acceptance of, or adherence to, this judgment.
- d. **Choice** – Concomitant with the intellectual judgement of choice the will performs the volitional act of adherence to this decision. This will-act is called election or choice.

### 4. Steps Concerned with the Execution

- a. **Command** – In the order of execution, the intellect and will are directed to the actual carrying out of the proposed work, which execution usually requires the use of other powers of man under the command of reason. The moral command must, first of all, be reasonable; it must issue from the intellect, supported by the active power of the will.
- b. **Execution** – This act of will is the principal, efficient cause of the commanded act; the other commanded potencies are instrumental causes, used by the will.
- c. **Delight or Enjoyment** – This final step is the appetitive enjoyment associated with the fulfillment of the act in relation to the end.

### 5. Qualification

- a. It is not necessary that each moral act should follow exactly the pattern of our analysis of the human act given above. The process may be stopped at any point.
- b. Nor is there any suggestion that each moral agent must advert to all these analytical steps at the time of performing the act. Just as a person may walk, without thinking of the complicated physiological analysis of such an action, so may a moral agent perform a moral act without introspecting on the parts of the action.

## III. Application

1. Keep practicing the Rule of Life
2. As we will discuss in a couple of months, there is a difference between antecedent and consequent conscience which means we need to think about what we do before and after we act. Knowing the steps of the human act can help assess what went right and what went wrong when we make choices.

## Episode #16 – The Morality of Human Acts

### I. Introduction

1. Opening Question: How do we judge the morality of our actions?
2. Last week, we discussed the steps of the human act.
3. This week, we are going to discuss how to determine the morality of human acts.

### II. The Morality of Human Acts

#### 1. The Sources of Morality – CCC 1750

- a. The morality of human acts depends on:
  - i. the object chosen;
  - ii. the end in view or the intention;
  - iii. the circumstances of the action.
- b. The object, the intention, and the circumstances make up the "sources," or constitutive elements, of the morality of human acts.

#### 2. The Moral Object – What?

- a. CCC 1751 – The object chosen is a good toward which the will deliberately directs itself. It is the matter of a human act. The object chosen morally specifies the act of the will, insofar as reason recognizes and judges it to be or not to be in conformity with the true good. Objective norms of morality express the rational order of good and evil, attested to by conscience.
- b. The Moral Object – Are human actions always good or bad?
  - i. For St. Thomas Aquinas, every particular human action is either good or bad. Aquinas would agree that actions can be neutral as long as we are referring to a kind of action rather than a specific instance of action (ST I-II, q. 18, a. 8; ST I-II, q. 18, a. 3).
  - ii. Although an action can be indifferent in itself, once that action is performed, it is no longer possible for it to be so. It will always be either morally good or morally wrong (ST I-II, q. 18, a. 9). This is because actions are always performed under a particular set of circumstances and for a particular end. In neither of these can there be neutral actions.

#### 3. Intention – CCC 1752-1753

- a. The answer to the why question gets to the motive or intention for performing an action.
- b. Intention is the aim or objective of a course of action. Intention is targeted to the goal of an action, what good (or evil) I want to happen. Why am I doing this?



- c. There are two rules for governing intentions:
  - i. Keep the intention good. For something to be morally good, both your action (what you do) and your intention (why you do it) must be good.
  - ii. The end does not justify the means. For an action to be moral, the means must be moral. On the other hand, an added bad intention (such as vainglory) makes an act evil that, in of itself, can be good (such as almsgiving).

#### 4. Circumstances – CCC 1754

- a. The circumstances, including the consequences, are secondary elements of a moral act. They contribute to increasing or diminishing the moral goodness or evil of human acts (for example, the amount of a theft). They can also diminish or increase the agent's responsibility (such as acting out of a fear of death).
- b. Circumstances of themselves cannot change the moral quality of acts themselves; they can make neither good nor right an action that is in itself evil.

#### 5. Good Acts and Evil Acts

- a. A morally good act requires the goodness of the object, of the end, and of the circumstances together. An evil end corrupts the action, even if the object is good in itself (such as praying and fasting "in order to be seen by men").
- b. CCC 1756 – It is therefore an error to judge the morality of human acts by considering only the intention that inspires them or the circumstances (environment, social pressure, duress or emergency, etc.) which supply their context. There are acts which, in and of themselves, independent of circumstances and intentions, are always gravely illicit by reason of their object; such as blasphemy and perjury, murder and adultery. One may not do evil so that good may result from it.

#### 6. Review

- a. Abstractly, human acts may be: good, bad, or indifferent. Concretely, the voluntary act must be either for or against man's attainment of his ultimate end, or to put it another way, it must be either reasonable or unreasonable.
- b. The morality of human acts depends on the object chosen, the end in view or the intention, and the circumstances of the action.

### III. Application

- 1. Keep practicing the Rule of Life
- 2. Reminder: We need to keep our intentions good and make sure our intentions while practicing our Rule of Life are pure. The number one reason we practice this rule is to help know and love God better. We must never lose our focus on this intention.