

# Journey of Faith



## In Short:

- Catholics should be aware of contemporary issues threaten human life.
- Some actions are intrinsic moral evils.
- Catholics should always work to defend life.



a lay member of the Dominican order. Her own life allowed her to understand the pain and suffering of others. Her faith and courage transformed her anguish into compassion. Today she is known by the Church as Blessed Margaret of Castello.

*"Choose life, then, that you and your descendents may live, by loving the LORD, your God, obeying his voice, and holding fast to him."*

*Deuteronomy 30:19–20*

## A Consistent Ethic of Life

### A Story of Life

In the year 1287, a little girl was born into a noble Italian family. Margaret's family didn't want her. She had a humpback, one leg was shorter than the other, her head was an unusual shape, and she was blind.



Her parents told people Margaret died at birth and banished her from the main rooms of their castle. Afraid that her identity might be revealed, her parents walled her into a tiny room in a forest chapel. Margaret didn't lose heart. With the help of the chapel priest, she learned how to turn her prison into a place of quiet contemplation.

Later, Margaret's parents took her to a city known for healing miracles, but when she wasn't miraculously cured they abandoned her at the church. Again, Margaret did not despair. Here she began giving her love and compassion to the poor of the city. This was the beginning of her remarkable ministry to the poor and the needy. Eventually she became a Third Order Dominican,

In 1983, Joseph Cardinal Bernardin called on U.S. Catholics to adopt what is called a **consistent life ethic**. This means we consider all human life sacred. For Catholics, life begins at the moment of conception until natural death. This includes the unborn, the elderly, the dying, the suffering, the imprisoned, and those with disabilities or mental illness. A consistent life ethic means there are no exceptions. Every human life is sacred.

Standing for a consistent life ethic means opposing **intrinsic moral evils**, actions that are always morally wrong, that threaten or demean human life, such as abortion or euthanasia. This also means considering **morally problematic** actions that may be justified but only in very specific instances, like war or capital punishment within the teaching and instruction of the Church.

Cardinal Bernardin said that a consistent life ethic would also include equally strong support for positive social programs that honor and respect life, from feeding the hungry and housing the homeless to helping the elderly and immigrants. Possessing a truly consistent life ethic is more difficult than it sounds and requires we not only believe but act on our beliefs.

*"Give to everyone who asks of you, and from the one who takes what is yours do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you."*

Luke 6:30–31

- Can you think of other examples of value blindness?
- How can we work to overcome these kinds of perceptions?



## Abortion and the Unique Preciousness of Life

*"Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception. From the first moment of conception, from the first moment of his existence, a human being must be recognized as having the rights of a person—among which is the inviolable right of every innocent being to life."*

CCC 2270

**Abortion**, the killing of an unborn child, is easily recognizable as a terrible evil because it destroys the most innocent and fragile form of human life. However, the issue of abortion can seem more complicated when we consider a young mother who isn't prepared, a family already in dire poverty, and the other fears and anxieties that can drive a woman to an abortion.

Catholic moral tradition not only asks us to protect the life of every unborn child but also requires we work to help ease the burden of the mother facing an unplanned pregnancy. We can help families bear these burdens by supporting or volunteering with an organization that provides abortion alternatives alongside financial and emotional supports.

- What are some ways you see members of your parish community supporting the pro-life movement?



## War and the Rights of the Innocent

*"Peace is not merely the absence of war, and it is not limited to maintaining a balance of powers between adversaries. Peace cannot be attained on earth without safeguarding the goods of persons, free communication among men, respect for the dignity of persons and peoples, and the assiduous practice of fraternity."*

CCC 2304

God created us to live in peace and harmony. The creation story in Genesis describes God's plan for our peaceful existence. Every human being has the right to live his or her life without fear of aggression. While Catholic teaching has always allowed for war in defense of one's country, the nature of modern war has greatly increased our need to work for peace in all circumstances. Modern warfare now affects the lives of thousands of innocent people.

The Church tells us that our respect for human life—including the lives of the citizens of countries with unjust or aggressive governments—makes it extremely important that we work for peace through meaningful, sincere negotiation and discussion. If we wish to uphold the values of Jesus, modern war can never be the way to lasting peace.

- List current world events where a consistent life ethic is needed.
- List current world events where a consistent life ethic is present.



## Euthanasia and Life's Sacredness

*"Those whose lives are diminished or weakened deserve special respect. Sick or handicapped persons should be helped to lead lives as normal as possible. Whatever its motives and means, direct euthanasia consists in putting an end to the lives of handicapped, sick, or dying persons. It is morally unacceptable."*

CCC 2276–2277

## Capital Punishment or Life Imprisonment

Many sincere Christians have become confused about **euthanasia** or physician-assisted suicide (deliberately ending someone's life) in recent times for two main reasons:

First, modern medical science has made it possible for many people who once would have died to continue living under conditions that are extremely burdensome to them or to those who care for them.

Second, pro-euthanasia organizations attempt to make us believe that we have a right to die when physical or mental pain becomes more than we believe we can bear. From their viewpoint, providing "death with dignity" is a noble duty for caregivers.

This stance blinds us to several things. We begin to believe that life's painful moments are all strikes against what should be a pain-free and happy life. We forget that pain and difficulties are part of human life and that we can grow tremendously from them. We see only two options for those sick and suffering, an existence filled with tremendous pain or death. In reality, today's hospice programs specialize in caring for people who are dealing with incurable diseases or certain death. Hospice caregivers specialize in the management of pain, both physical and emotional. They work with the patient and the patient's family, supporting them with necessary pain medications, counseling, and medical information.

The Catholic Church teaches that life is sacred, even in its final phases on earth, but that doesn't mean we must cling to life on earth by all extraordinary means when death is likely. The deliberate killing of the sick or disabled is contrary to God's law.

On the other hand, we don't need to prolong a person's life with extraordinary technology when there is no hope of recovery. Human beings should be allowed to die a natural death. The Church recognizes God as the author of every human life. It also recognizes God as the one who determines when every human life will end its earthly existence.

*"If, however, non-lethal means are sufficient to defend and protect people's safety from the aggressor, authority will limit itself to such means, as these are more in keeping with the concrete conditions of the common good and more in conformity with the dignity of the human person."*

CCC 2267

**Capital punishment**, the death penalty, is a difficult issue. Even those who consider themselves pro-life disagree with each other over capital punishment. Those opposing capital punishment argue that all killing is wrong, even the killing of a hardened criminal. Those who believe that capital punishment is sometimes justified say that abortion is absolutely different from the punishment of those who have deliberately taken the lives of others. Both sides make compelling arguments.

The Catholic Church has always tried to balance justice and mercy in regard to the treatment of those who commit murder. The U.S. bishops have chosen to place the stress on witnessing to the value of every human life, no matter how guilty the individual may be, by voting against support for state laws allowing capital punishment. The bishops support the use and enforcement of life imprisonment so that the criminal can no longer be a threat to society.

But perhaps most importantly, the U.S. bishops are seeking to uphold a consistent life ethic even under the most difficult of circumstances. Christ consistently regarded all life as precious and valuable. He saw every life as being created in the image and likeness of God. The Catholic Church challenges us to do the same.


- How does allowing God to determine when life ends preserve the dignity of life?



Pick one of the three issues below and answer the following questions:

- What reasons do people give for it?
- Against it?
- What does the Church teach?

(1) Capital punishment (2) Euthanasia (3) Abortion



Being pro-life doesn't just mean participating in these issues on a large or political scale. We can show our respect for life in small, everyday actions.

List some ways you can become more pro-life or ways you can show others their lives have value.

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