

Homily of Fr. Tony Davis
The Church of our Conscience
32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year C) November 6, 2022

Our Catholic Churches are great places to pray. Whether it is an old-style cathedral, a modern architectural design, or a plain structure, people all over the world find their churches to be peaceful places. While we thank God for these Churches, there is another important church that we should visit often to pray. In the words of Archbishop Oscar Romero, the former archbishop of San Salvador, “we all have a church within ourselves, our own conscience.” He continues, “there God is, God’s Spirit. Blessed are those who do not forsake that shrine by failing to pray. Blessed are those who enter often to speak alone with their God.” (The Violence of Love, 68-9)

In today’s First Reading from the Second Book of Maccabees, we heard portions of the story of seven brothers who were intent on following their consciences. They were willing to undergo anything, including terrible maltreatment, torture, and death, in order to be faithful to them. While we might judge their actions to be a bit extreme, they do remind us of the inviolability of conscience. All of us are called to go to great lengths to follow our conscience. Admittedly, conscience is hard to define. Here are a few thoughts to help us think about it.

1) Our conscience is not simply our opinions. Opinions are valid, but usually we have a lot of them and they touch on trivial matters. Our conscience, on the other hand, resides at a more fundamental level. It is not concerned about having many passing thoughts on many matters, but about developing deeper thoughts on the essential issues that really do matter. That is why Vatican II called it “the most secret core and the sanctuary of the human person.” (GS 16)

2) Our conscience is not an easy yes or no answer to life’s questions. The Sadducees in today’s Gospel are an example of this. They wanted an easy answer to their trick question, ‘if a woman had 7 husbands during her life on earth, who would she be married to in heaven?’ As we heard, Jesus refused to answer that question. Conscience, unlike this question from the Sadducees, takes us into the complexity of issues in which there are no clear-cut answers. It involves struggle, perseverance, change, and lots of prayerful reflection.

3) Our conscience is unique to us. Just as no two people are exactly the same, so too no two consciences are exactly the same. This means that we do not have to come to the same exact conclusions on matters of conscience as others and that there might be a legitimate range of responses to life’s mysterious questions. It also means that we cannot simply copy someone else’s conclusions without doing the soul searching for ourselves.

In order to know and follow our conscience, we should treat it like a Church in which we go often to pray. How do I form my conscience on an ongoing basis? Do I try my best to follow my conscience, regardless of negative consequence.

As we continue with this mass, let us pray that we may be women and men of conscience. Archbishop Oscar Romero, like the 7 brothers in Maccabees, suffered greatly for his conscience and eventually became a martyr for it. Each time we come out of the church of our conscience, may we have that same courage.