



# Bringing Home the Word

Sixth Sunday of Easter (C)

May 26, 2019

## Trust the Spirit for Guidance

By Mary Katharine Deeley

For many Catholics, Vatican Council II was a watershed moment in Church history. I remember the nuns in our school turning on the radio to listen to reports. They shared what St. John XXIII said at the start of the council. The media still follow large Church events, but it's easy to forget that Church leaders have been gathering to talk about the issues of the day since the first century.

In the first reading, we hear about the Council of Jerusalem in fairly abbreviated form. The apostles and other leaders of the Church came together to discuss

whether Gentiles had to be circumcised (a tenet of Jewish Law) before they were baptized. There were legitimate claims on both sides. Remarkably, the leaders prayed, talked, and prayed some more. They spoke from their experience and their faith. They assumed that all the assembled were people of faith, and so they wrestled together to find the answer most in keeping with the commands of Jesus.

In the end, when they decided to admit Gentiles without circumcising them, the whole community recognized that the Holy Spirit was at work, and the letter sent to the various churches began, "It is the decision of the Holy Spirit and of us...." The Council of Jerusalem gives us a model for resolving our differences: pray, dialogue, and pray some more.

This week, read all of Acts 15 to see what happens when we trust the Spirit to guide us rightly: arguments fall silent, and we find delight, strength, and peace (see Acts 15:12, 31–32 and John 14:27). +

## Sunday Readings

### Acts 15:1–2, 22–29

"It is the decision of the holy Spirit and of us not to place on you any burden beyond these necessities."

### Revelation 21:10–14, 22–23

The city had no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gave it light.

### John 14:23–29

[Jesus said,] "The holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name—he will teach you everything and remind you of all that [I] told you."

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and pray some more.*

## A Word from Pope Francis

Our ideal is not to live without love! A good pastor renounces the love of a family precisely in order to focus all his energies and the grace of his particular vocation on the evangelical blessing of the love of men and women who carry forward God's plan of creation.

—Meeting with bishops,  
September 27, 2015



## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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- When faced with moral decisions, do I research what the Church has to say?
- Do I make an effort to know what the pope or my bishop is teaching?

# Just Follow Your Informed Conscience

By Jim and Susan Vogt

Is it really that simple? Yes. No. Maybe!

Yes, it's simple, but not quite *that* simple.

A woman steals food for her family when her unemployment runs out. A man decides not to report cash income on his taxes. When faced with moral decisions, people say you must follow your conscience, and indeed that is what one must do. But how do we hear our consciences, and is it possible to follow one's conscience and still be wrong?

The Catholic Church teaches a principle called "primacy of conscience," which means that conscience is the ultimate authority and we're compelled to follow it: "A human being must always obey the certain judgment of his conscience" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1790). We must also make the effort to have an "informed" conscience: "The education of the conscience is a lifelong task" (CCC 1784). In other words, it's not just doing what feels good.

So how does a person develop a well-formed conscience? Here are some traps to consider in coming to decisions of conscience.

## Traps to Conscience Formation

**1. Rationalization.** When faced with paying income taxes, it's tempting to think, "Hey, rich people get big tax breaks. Is it really so wrong for me to fudge a little on my income tax return?"

**2. Scrupulosity.** Another trap is being scrupulous about the letter of the law while missing its spirit. When Susan was young, her godparents took her out for lobster every Good Friday. Technically, they kept the law of abstaining from meat, but a lobster dinner was hardly the sacrifice the law intended.

**3. Going along with the crowd.** How could so many people be wrong? For years, most adults didn't think twice about driving after drinking. Just because it's common doesn't make it right.

**4. If it feels good, do it.** Conscience shouldn't be guided



solely by emotion. Following it may not coincide with happiness—at least not fleeting feelings of bliss. Eating half a dozen doughnuts may feel good—temporarily—but this affects one's long-term health.

**5. It's my body; it's my business.** Just because I'm not directly harming another person doesn't mean my action is good. Drug addiction or pornography may seem like victimless crimes, but they not only hurt the doer, they also weaken the moral fabric of society.

## Steps to Forming a Christian Conscience

The STOP method is an easy framework for checking one's conscience.

**S—Study.** Decisions of conscience begin with knowledge. It's not a matter of being smart, but of making serious efforts to learn the facts from credible sources, such as reading what the Church teaches and consulting experts.

**T—Think Together.** It's best not to make decisions in isolation. A married couple shouldn't make an important moral decision without discussing it and coming to something mutually agreeable. In faith communities, this means testing out the options with other believers and seeking consensus.

**O—Others' Experiences.** Wisdom is also carried by others who have experienced an issue. Don't listen only to people with whom you agree. Consult with others whose experience has led them to different conclusions.

**P—Pray.** Important decisions should always be brought to prayer so that we can check our rationalizations and be honest before God. Prayer provides us time to listen and sort.

Done all the steps? Still unsure? This quick version of conscience formation could be summed up by asking two other questions: Is my contemplated decision life-giving? Is it generous? A well-formed conscience doesn't simply apply rules but brings the whole self to the decision and weighs how each decision will affect the common good. +

## WEEKDAY READINGS

May 27-June 1

**Monday, Easter Weekday:**  
Acts 16:11–15 / Jn 15:26–16:4a

**Tuesday, Easter Weekday:**  
Acts 16:22–34 / Jn 16:5–11

**Wednesday, Easter Weekday:**  
Acts 17:15, 22–18:1 / Jn 16:12–15

**Thursday, Easter Weekday:**  
Acts 18:1–8 / Jn 16:16–20

**Friday, Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary:**  
Zep 3:14–18a or Rom 12:9–16 / Lk 1:39–56

**Saturday, St. Justin:**  
Acts 18:23–28 / Jn 16:23b–28