

FORMING OUR CONSCIENCE IV

“Prudence” leads the soul to faithfully follow what is right and just.

Although it is possible for us to suppress our conscience, in the person who seeks to do good and avoid evil, welcoming the commandments, that is the prudent person, who can hear God speaking in his or her conscience. The conscience needs therefore to be formed according to prudence: that is in the Word of God and in the commandments, in the practice of virtues and the resistance towards vice. In such a one, the “ears of their heart” are open to know God’s truth, and the mind is set upon the good. Such a one has the desire to follow faithfully what he or she knows to be just and right. Additionally it requires that we be sufficiently present to ourselves in order to hear and follow the voice of conscience. This “interiority” is necessary because so often life distracts us from reflection, self-examination and introspection, and we behave or choose in the moment not based on our consciences, but based on what seems expedient. The formation of the conscience thus is an essential element in the formation of the prudent Christian: that is one who follows his or her conscience. The prudent man or woman chooses and responds “in conformity with this judgment.” [Catechism 1780] In other words there is nothing magic about following our conscience, it is not infallible, and only leads us to God and to life when we are formed in the Scripture and in the Tradition of the Church. Theologian John Henry Newman put it this way: “Conscience, who both in nature and in grace, speaks to us behind a veil, and teaches and rules us by his representatives” [the Church]. He goes on to say that “conscience is the aboriginal Vicar of Christ” – in other words when we walk in conformity with the teaching of the Pope, we are on solid ground.

IHM Pray for us.

Fr. Jerry