

IT'S YOUR CHOICE

RESPONSIBILITY

GRADES K-8

There are four main topics to reflect on and discuss. (1) We are free to choose and must use our freedom responsibly. (2) There are consequences for the choices we make. (3) We are responsible not only for our actions, but in some cases are responsible for the actions of others. (4) Being a hard worker is part of being responsible.

1. It Is Our Choice

READ SIRACH 15:14-17

When God, in the beginning, created man, he made him subject to his own free choice. If you choose, you can keep the commandments; it is loyalty to do His will. There are set before you fire and water; to whichever you choose, stretch forth your hand. Before man is life and death, whichever he chooses shall be given him.

It is our responsibility to choose, a responsibility given to each person by God. It is in this choice that we are free, and Christ has set us free so that we may choose freedom. "Freedom is the power to act or not to act, and so to perform deliberate acts of one's own. Freedom attains perfection in its acts when directed toward God, the sovereign Good" (CCC, 1744). We are free, and it is our responsibility to choose life or death, good or bad, to act or to not act. God does not force Himself on us nor does He force choices on us. God willed that man should be left in the hand of his own counsel (Sirach 15:14), so that he might of his own accord seek his Creator and freely attain his full and blessed perfection by cleaving to Him" (GS 17:1) (CCC, 1743). We are challenged and responsible to use our freedom to make us free. In the words of St. Paul, we are to be responsible with our choice so that we "not be conquered by evil but conquer evil with good" (Romans 12:21).

2. We Are Responsible for What We Choose

We are free to choose, and because of this freedom, God must give us what we choose. In Sirach we read that both fire and water are set before us, both life and death are set before us. Whatever it is that we choose, we are going to be given. We are,

therefore, responsible for what we are given because we freely chose. God is not pleased with our choice when we use our choice irresponsibly and choose bad rather than good. In the following three verses God asks Eve, Cain, and King David why they chose what they did. Each is responsible for answering to God for the choice they freely made.

GENESIS 3:13—EVE

The Lord God then asked the woman, "Why did you do such a thing?" The woman answered, "The serpent tricked me into it, and so I ate it."

GENESIS 4:10—CAIN

The Lord then said: "What have you done? Listen: your brother's blood cries out to me from the soil!"

2 SAMUEL 7-9—KING DAVID

Thus says the Lord God of Israel: "I anointed you king of Israel. I rescued you from the hand of Saul. I gave you your lord's house and your lord's wives for your own. I gave you the house of Israel and of Judah. And if this were not enough, I could count up for you still more. Why have you spurned the Lord and done evil in his sight?"

The choices we make not only affect our own lives, but the lives of others and of society as a whole. We are, therefore, responsible for both the effect our choice has on us and the effect it has on our brothers and sisters. We must accept this responsibility. "Conscience enables one to assume responsibility for the acts performed . . . In attesting to the fault committed . . . the good must still be practiced, and the virtue must be constantly cultivated with the grace of God" (CCC, 1781).

"Cain's killing of his brother at the very dawn of history is thus a sad witness of how evil spreads with amazing speed: man's revolt against God in the

earthly paradise is followed by the deadly combat of man against man. After the crime, God intervenes to avenge the one killed. Before God, who asks him about the fate of Abel, Cain, instead of showing remorse and apologizing, arrogantly eludes the question: 'I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?' (Genesis 4:9). 'I do not know': Cain tries to cover up his crime with a lie. This was and still is the case, when all kinds of ideologies try to justify and disguise the most atrocious crimes against human beings. 'Am I my brother's keeper?': Cain does not wish to think about his brother and refuses to accept responsibility, which every person has toward others. We cannot but think of today's tendency for people to refuse to accept responsibility for their brothers and sisters" (Evangelium Vitae, Pope John Paul II).

3. Take Your Responsibility Seriously

READ MATTHEW 27:18–24

The chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas but to destroy Jesus. The governor said to them in reply, "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" They answered, "Barabbas!" Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus called Messiah?" They all said, "Let him be crucified!" But he said, "Why? What evil has he done?" They only shouted the louder, "Let him be crucified!" When Pilate saw that a riot was breaking out instead, he took water and washed his hands in the sight of the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood. Look to it yourselves."

Many times in life we are tempted to hand over our responsibility to another person or group of people. At school when there is a group project, it can be tempting to let the group make the choice that you are responsible for. We are responsible for the choices we make and for the choices we allow others to make on our behalf. Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea, was asked to make a choice about whether Jesus should live or die. He washed his hands clean of the decision and allowed the people to make the choice for him. Now both Pilate and the people are respon-

sible for the choice. "We have a responsibility for the sins committed by others when we cooperate in them by participating directly and voluntarily in them; by ordering, advising, praising, or approving them; by not disclosing or not hindering them when we have an obligation to do so and by protecting evil-doers" (CCC, 1868).

4. Are You Working Hard or Hardly Working

One of the greatest ways we learn how to be responsible for our choices is through the work we are given. Whether the work is schoolwork, homework, a job, or a chore around the house, the choices we make with our work and the attitude with which we work teaches us responsibility for our choices. It should be the goal of everyone to be a saint. St. Mary Joseph Rossello, who lived from 1811 to 1880, said, "You will become a Saint by complying exactly with your daily duties." It is through the choices we make in our work that our Christian life is seen. St. Vincent Pallotti, who lived from 1795 to 1850, said, "Remember that the Christian life is one of action; not of speech and daydreams. Let there be few words and many deeds, and let them be done well."

PRAYER TO ST. JOSEPH THE WORKMAN (COMPOSED BY POPE ST. PIUS X)

O Glorious St. Joseph, model of all those who are those who are devoted to labor, obtain for me the grace to work attentively, putting the call of duty above my natural inclinations, to work with gratitude and joy, in a spirit of penance for the remission of my sins, considering it an honor to employ and develop by means of labor the gifts received from God, to work with order, peace, moderation and patience, without ever shrinking from weariness and difficulties, to work above all with purity of intention and detachment from self, having always death before my eyes and the account that I must render of time lost, of talents wasted, of good omitted, of vain complacency in success, so fatal to the work of God. All for Jesus, all through Mary, all after thine example, O Patriarch, St. Joseph. Such shall be my watchword in life and in death. Amen.

REFLECTIONS AND QUESTIONS

RESPONSIBILITY

GRADES K-2

You make many choices each week. Which pencil or pen to use in school, which toy or friend to play with, and to obey your parents or teacher or to be naughty.

How do you make a good choice? Who can help you?

When you make a choice, something happens. If you choose to have an apple to eat, then you will get the apple, not a pear or an orange. If you choose a pen and not a pencil to use, then you will be writing with a pen.

If you choose to disobey your parents or your teacher, what do you think will happen? Why?

If someone asks you to steal something or to hurt someone else or anything that is wrong, should you say “yes”?

What choice do you make by letting someone else choose for you?

When should you do your best? Why should you try your hardest?

REFLECTIONS AND QUESTIONS

RESPONSIBILITY

GRADES THREE AND FOUR

Why do you think God gave us free will, and how should you use your free will?

Is it easier to choose to do good or bad?

How do you feel when you choose to do good?

How do you feel when you choose to do bad?

Who should you go to when you can't make a wise decision on your own?

When you are given a group task, are you the leader or are you the follower?

Which role is easier to do?

Do you take the initiative to complete a given task, or do you let others do the work?

Why is it important to take your responsibility seriously?

When you are given a task/chore, do you complete it to the best of your ability or do you do it (minimally) to get it over with?

Why is it important to complete a task using your best efforts?

Who do you know that is a hard worker? Do you admire that person? Why?

REFLECTIONS AND QUESTIONS

RESPONSIBILITY

GRADES FIVE AND SIX

Our conscience (ability to judge right and wrong) must be correctly formed in order to make good choices. Name some things (or people) who can help you form a correct conscience.

You choose to cheat on a major test. What are the consequences in your own life and how can this affect others?

A friend of yours tries to persuade you to gang up on another student because he/she is "different." You don't join in, but you don't try to stop them either. How are you failing in your responsibility?

What type of chores or responsibilities do you have at home? How do these make you a better person?

REFLECTIONS AND QUESTIONS

RESPONSIBILITY

GRADES SEVEN AND EIGHT

St. Mary Joseph Rossello said, "You will become a Saint by complying exactly with your daily duties."

What are your daily duties? How well do you follow them?

Give an example in which you let another person make a choice for you and they made a good choice.

Give an example in which you let another person make a choice for you and they made a bad choice.

What would happen in our lives, our world, if no one was held responsible for their choices?

Questions from grades five and six may also be used.