

Our Equality of Rights Comes from God

CCC

1945

Standards

CCE (5-8): V.B.1-4

Teacher Background:

The American commitment to equality, beautifully articulated in the Declaration of Independence, is rightly admired. This idea is at the heart of Catholic teaching on the human person. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches: “The equality of men concerns their dignity as persons and the rights that flow from it” (CCC 1945). Since being created in the image and likeness of God gives us human dignity, and our natural rights flow from our human dignity, all people have the same (or an equality of) natural rights – rights that come from our human nature.



Equality is at the heart of Catholic teaching on the human person.

To do with your students:

-  Go over the key points from the information above.
-  Write the quote from the *Catechism* on the board. If needed, remind your students that “all men” means all people.
-  Have students imagine they are writing to a friend in another country who does not believe all people have the same rights. Have them write a paragraph explaining how they know that all human beings have the same natural rights.

All Humans Really Do Have Equal Rights

CCC

1945

Standards

CCE (5-8) V.B.1-4



Our rights are the same regardless of sex, race, disability, age, or any other difference.

Teacher Background:

The background for this activity is a review: the American commitment to equality, beautifully articulated in the Declaration of Independence, is rightly admired. This idea is at the heart of Catholic teaching on the human person. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches: “The equality of men concerns their dignity as persons and the rights that flow from it” (CCC 1945). Since being created in the image and likeness of God gives us human dignity, and our natural rights flow from our human dignity, all people have the same (or an equality of) natural rights – rights that come from our human nature.

To do with your students:

-  Remind your students about the information in the previous activity, and go over the key points from the information above.
-  Ask a series of “what if” questions, designed to lead your students to the understanding that the statement all human beings have equal rights and dignity really means what it says. For example:
 - › What if someone is not as smart as other people? Does he still have equal rights? *Yes.*
 - › What if someone is not as popular? Does she still have equal rights? *Yes.*
 - › What if someone is not as good-looking? Does he still have equal rights? *Yes.*
 - › What if someone is a different religion, or race, or ethnicity? Does she still have equal rights? *Yes.*
 - › What if someone is not as healthy as other people? Does she still have equal rights? *Yes. Explain this is why the Church teaches that euthanasia, or killing someone because she is very ill, is wrong.*

- ▶ What if someone is not as young as other people? Does he still have equal rights? Yes. Explain this is why the Church teaches that euthanasia, or killing someone because he is elderly and infirm, is wrong.
- ▶ What if someone is not as grown-up as other people? Does she still have equal rights? Yes. Explain this is why the Church teaches that abortion, the killing of a baby growing in her mother's womb, is wrong.

Offer your own additional examples as needed.

Our Human Dignity and Natural Rights

Equality Is a Christian Idea

CCC
1945

Standards
CCE (5-8) V.B.1-4

Teacher Background:

We often take for granted the idea that all lives have inherent worth and all people should be treated equally. But it was not always this way. Slavery was common in pagan Rome, as it had been throughout the ancient world. Not only that, but sickly babies were routinely left to die of exposure, and the sick, elderly, or infirm were often abandoned. This gives us an idea of how radical a statement it was when St. Paul wrote to the Galatians that we are all one in Jesus Christ, no matter our race, ethnicity, sex, or status as a free person or slave. It was Christianity and Christian morality that first asserted that all human beings are created equal, and have inherent rights by virtue of their humanity.



Abolitionists in the U.S. raised awareness of the evils of slavery by calling attention to the humanity of enslaved people.



A Memphis protest in 1968 echoed the abolitionist theme of humanity.

To do with your students:

-  Go over the key points from the information above.
-  Show students the two photographs and ask them to write a paragraph explaining their significance and the connection to Catholic teaching.

Our Human Dignity and Natural Rights

Good Government Protects Our Pre-Existing Rights

CCC

1934, 1945

Standards

CCE (5-8) I.A.1;
V.B.1-4, V.B.1-4

Teacher Background:

All people have certain natural rights by virtue of their humanity, and it is the proper role of government to protect those rights. Governments protect natural rights; they *do not grant them*. If rights were “given to us” by government, then some people could have more rights than others, and no one could say there was anything wrong with that. If rights were “given to us” by the government or by anyone else, it would also mean our rights could be taken away at any time; parents could kill their children, a majority vote could condemn any one of us. It is only through a claim that our rights are God-given and fundamental to our nature that anyone can say human beings are equal and deserve to be treated with dignity.



Only if our rights are God-given and fundamental to our nature can we say human beings are equal and deserve to be treated with dignity.

To do with your students:

 Rewrite on the board the selections from the Declaration of Independence and the *Catechism* from the previous activities.

 Ask a student to come up and underline any parts of these statements that are similar. Students should underline:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

“Created in the image of the one God and equally endowed with rational souls, all men have the same nature and the same origin” (CCC 1934).

“The equality of men concerns their dignity as persons and the rights that flow from it” (CCC 1945).

 Discuss as a large group the questions:

- › Where do our rights come from?
- › From where do we get the idea of equality?
- › If we are all equally endowed with rights, what does that mean? How does this help us know that all human life is precious?
- › Do we get them from the government, or does the government simply protect rights that were already ours to begin with?

The Declaration of Independence

CCC

1945

Standards

CCE (5-8): I.A.1-2

Teacher Background:

The Declaration of Independence (1776) affirms God as the source of our natural rights: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights.”

The Declaration also contains additional references to God, for example: “... appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions. ... And for the support of this Declaration, with firm reliance on the Protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor.” [emphasis added]



The Declaration of Independence affirms God as the source of our natural rights.

To do with your students:

-  Share the information above with your students.
-  Have a class discussion about how the American commitment to equality is beautifully articulated in the Declaration of Independence, and how this idea is at the heart of Catholic teaching on the human person.
-  Write on the board and go over the following quote from the *Catechism*: “The equality of men concerns their dignity as persons and the rights that flow from it” (CCC 1945). Explain that being created in the image and likeness of God gives us human dignity, and our natural rights flow from our human dignity. Therefore, all people have the same (or an equality of) natural rights.