

# Piety and Patriotism Go Together



## Middle School-Aged Children

*This packet includes a number of activities to help your children understand and appreciate the uniquely American ideas in the Declaration of Independence.*

## ☆☆☆ Activity 1 ☆☆☆

# WHERE DO OUR RIGHTS COME FROM?

### Context for This Activity

The U.S. national government and all U.S. state governments are based on the foundation that all people have certain natural rights by virtue of their humanity. Governments do not grant us our natural rights; rather, governments protect rights that we already have. The Declaration of Independence (like other Enlightenment-era documents) says our rights come from an abstract “Creator,” and refers to “Nature’s God.” But the Catholic Church teaches very clearly that our rights flow from our human dignity that comes from being made in the image and likeness of God. Therefore, every single human being is equal in rights and dignity. This is a basic restatement of the teaching of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, as well as the Declaration of Independence!

### To Do with Your Children

Share the key points from the information above, in your own words.

Read aloud, or listen to, a short selection from the Declaration of Independence available at [SophiaOnline.org/DOI-Preamble](https://www.sophiaonline.org/DOI-Preamble) or by scanning the QR code: “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.”



Ask your children to put this phrase in their own words. If needed, define the following words:

- To be **endowed** with something means to have it naturally or to be given it as a gift.
- **Inalienable** rights are rights that can never be taken away. (We cannot be alienated from them.)
- The **pursuit** of something is the attempt to find or capture it.

Share and discuss your children’s ideas together. Then, ask: from where did the Founding Fathers believe we get our rights? *They are the gift of our Creator, or God.*

Provide for your children a clear definition of “rights” — rights are those things to which we have a just claim. In other words, things we can claim are rightly ours. Therefore, there can be no such thing as a “right” to anything that is sinful or harmful to others.

Consider extending with a discussion on things that are commonly considered “rights” but may or may not fulfill the definition as stated above.



## ☆☆☆ Activity 2 ☆☆☆

# THE SOURCE OF OUR HUMAN DIGNITY: HUMAN NATURE

### Context for This Activity

Of all God's creatures, only human beings are made in the image and likeness of God. This is the source of our rights; our rights flow from our human dignity. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches, "Respect for the human person entails respect for the rights that flow from his dignity as a creature" (CCC 1930). No other creatures have these rights in the same way human beings do!

### To Do with Your Children

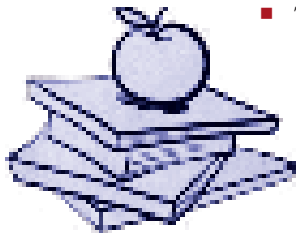
Remind your children about the information in the previous activity, and go over the key points from the information above.

Read or listen to the following selection from paragraph 1934 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, available at [SophiaOnline.org/CCC-1934](http://SophiaOnline.org/CCC-1934) : "Created in the image of the one God and equally endowed with rational souls, all men have the same nature and the same origin."

Be sure your children understand that "all men" means all people. Then ask what it means that all people have "the same nature." Make sure your children understand this phrase means that we all have a human nature, and our nature includes the rights that flow from our being created in the image and likeness of God.

Point out the presence of the word "nature" in the phrase "natural rights." Explain the connection between our human nature and natural rights, i.e., that our *natural* rights come from our *nature* as human beings.

Extend this conversation by going over what having the same nature does NOT mean. For example, it does not mean we all have the same interests, talents, physical abilities, and so forth.



- This would be a great time to talk with your children about some of their favorite activities. Maybe one likes sports, and the other likes painting. You might share how you struggle with a certain skill, and your spouse struggles with a different one. All people do not all have the same skills or talents, but we do all have equal rights and dignity!
- Explain that this idea of natural equality is a uniquely American idea in the world. We cherish it as Americans, and it is part of our national identity. And it came from Christianity!





## ☆☆☆ Activity 3 ☆☆☆

# THE SOURCE OF OUR HUMAN DIGNITY: GOD

### Context for This Activity

The background for this activity is a review: of all God's creatures, only human beings are made in the image and likeness of God. This is the source of our rights; our rights flow from our human dignity. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches, "Respect for the human person entails respect for the rights that flow from his dignity as a creature" (CCC 1930). No other creatures have these rights in the same way human beings do.

### To Do with Your Children

Go over the key points from the context above.

Reread or listen again to CCC 1934: "Created in the image of the one God and equally endowed with rational souls, all men have the same nature and the same origin."

Ask what it means that all men have the same origin. Make sure your children understand this means that we were all created by God.

Extend this conversation by going over what having the same origin does NOT mean. For example, it does not mean we all have the same parents, or the same backgrounds, or ethnicities, races, and so forth. But despite all these differences, we have the same human nature, and we were all created by God. Every member of the entire human race is God's creation.

Explain that plants and animals are also beloved creatures of God, but they do not have the same dignity as a human person, and do not bear God's image in the same way. If you have a pet, you could bring it up as an example here. Imagine together what life and society would be like if dogs were allowed to drive cars and own property, if cats could vote, and so on.





## ☆☆☆ Activity 4 ☆☆☆

# OUR EQUALITY OF RIGHTS COMES FROM GOD

### Context for This Activity

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 Children

Go over the key points from the context above.

Listen to, or read aloud, the quotes from the Declaration and the *Catechism*. The readings are available by scanning the QR codes, or by visiting [SophiaOnline.org/DOI-Preamble](https://www.sophia.org/DOI-Preamble) and [SophiaOnline.org/CCC-1945](https://www.sophia.org/CCC-1945). If needed, remind your children that “all men” means all people.

Have your children imagine they are writing a postcard to a friend in another country who does not believe all people have the same rights. For the front of the postcard, have them design a creative picture that shows different kinds of people living together.

On the back, have them write a short note explaining how they know that all human beings have the same natural rights.

Display these on your refrigerator when complete!





## ☆☆☆ Activity 5 ☆☆☆

# ALL HUMANS REALLY DO HAVE EQUAL RIGHTS

### Context for This Activity

The American commitment to equality, beautifully articulated in the Declaration of Independence, is a cherished part of our national identity as Americans. This idea is also 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 Children

Go over the key points from the context above. Listen to, or read aloud, the quotes from the Declaration and the *Catechism*. The readings are available by scanning the QR codes, or by visiting [SophiaOnline.org/DOI-Preamble](https://SophiaOnline.org/DOI-Preamble) and [SophiaOnline.org/CCC-1945](https://SophiaOnline.org/CCC-1945).

Then ask a series of “what if” questions, designed to lead your children 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*.
- Offer your own additional examples as needed.





## ☆☆☆ Activity 6 ☆☆☆

# EQUALITY IS A CHRISTIAN IDEA

### Context for This Activity

We often take for granted the idea that all lives have inherent worth. But this was actually a radical idea before Jesus came. Slavery was common in pagan Rome, as it had been throughout the ancient world. 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 ground-breaking 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.

Christianity did not eliminate slavery or injustice, of course, but it gave the world the only principles by which anyone could claim that it was wrong. Even today, where Christianity is absent, so is true respect for human dignity. We tend to assume everyone everywhere believes that all people should be treated equally. But it is Christianity and Christian morality alone that teaches all human beings are created equal, and have rights simply because they are human. These principles are at the heart of the Declaration of Independence!

### To Do with Your Children

Go over the key points from above.

Show your children the two images on the next page and have a conversation about their significance and connection to Catholic teaching: the idea that a man, or a human being, is a *person* and not a *thing*; a *who* and not a *what*.

Emphasize that if the U.S. did not live up to its founding ideals, that does not mean those ideals are bad. Slavery has been practiced throughout the world since the dawn of recorded history. The reality that the U.S. permitted slavery in many states until the ratification of the 13th amendment should be taught alongside the reality that Americans were among the first in world history to end slavery.

Extend by discussing with your children what might happen if our society forgets the inherent dignity of a human life. Have them consider how they might rekindle a respect and love for human life, taking inspiration from the two images, and how they might defend your family from mistreatment at the hands of those who have forgotten the value of a human life.



## ☆☆☆ Activity 7 ☆☆☆

# GOOD GOVERNMENT PROTECTS OUR PRE-EXISTING RIGHTS

### Context for This Activity

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, and 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.

### To Do with Your Children

Go over again the selections from the Declaration of Independence and the *Catechism* from the previous activities.

Ask your children whether any parts of these statements are similar to each other.

Discuss over dinner or in the car the following 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 our rights from the government, or does the government simply protect rights that were already ours to begin with?

Ask your children how they would write the Constitution if they were founding a new nation. Work together with them to come up with a document that outlines how a government that respects the rights and dignity of its citizens ought to operate.





## ☆☆☆ Activity 8 ☆☆☆

# WHAT ARE INALIENABLE RIGHTS?

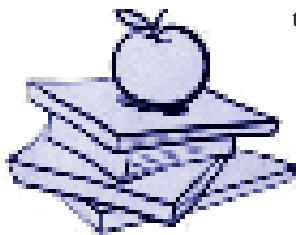
### Context for This Activity

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.”



### To Do with Your Children

- Share the information above. Then have a 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.
- Then, by scanning the QR code or visiting [SophiaTeachers.org/CCC-1945](https://www.sophiateachers.org/CCC-1945), read or listen to 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.
- Discuss with your children which rights flow from our intrinsic human dignity (and therefore are truly inalienable), and which rights do not. The Church teaches that our rights flow from our responsibilities. We have a right to private property, for example, because we have the responsibility to care for ourselves and our families. Freedom of religion comes from our responsibility to worship God.



- Work together to come up with a list of questions to ask when trying to tell whether something is a true natural right. So, for example, you could ask: “is this necessary for a person to live rightly and grow closer to God?” if the answer is no, it is not truly a natural right (or a right that comes from human nature).



## \*\*\* Activity 9 \*\*\*

# CHRIST THE PEACEMAKER

### *Context for This Activity*

Earthly peace is a good and very important goal — one we must all strive for. But spiritual peace is an even greater one. Jesus is the Prince of Peace. He reconciles us to Himself and the Church when we sin through the Sacrament of Confession. He also gives us His peace in the Eucharist. One of the last things we say at Mass before we receive the Eucharist is “...Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, grant us peace.” The ultimate peace is found in being united with Christ. On earth, we receive this gift chiefly in the Eucharist.

### *To Do with Your Children*

Read aloud from Matthew 5:9: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” After meditating on this verse from the Beatitudes for a few moments, have your children explain at least one earthly way and one spiritual way that Jesus is the Prince of Peace. For example:

- He restores man to communion with God (the just order between God and humanity) with His sacrifice on the Cross. (spiritual peace)
- He reconciles us to Him and the Church when we sin in the Sacrament of Confession. (spiritual peace)
- He offers us His Body and Blood in the Eucharist, so we can be united with Him and His Church, the Body of Christ. (spiritual peace)
- He commands us to work for a just order between ourselves, that is, rightly-ordered relationships among families, communities—including special care for the poor—and among nations. (earthly peace)

Ask your children about conflicts present in their lives. Examples include an argument between siblings, a fight between two of their friends, or a major geopolitical conflict. It need not personally involve them. Discuss ways that they can be peacemakers in regard to this conflict.





## ☆☆☆ Activity 10 ☆☆☆

# AND HE SHALL REIGN FOREVER AND EVER

### Context for This Activity

The Prophet Isaiah describes the Kingdom of God, which Christ will usher in in all of its fullness at the end of time: “to bring all men the definitive order of justice, love and peace” (CCC 672). The world began with Original Justice, and time will end in the perfect justice, love, and peace of Christ.

### To Do with Your Children

Read out Isaiah 11:1-9. Point out that the prophet is speaking here in the future tense: these amazing things will happen in the future. What are we to make of that?

Explain that the *Catechism* helps us understand that this passage describes the Kingdom of God, which Christ will usher in in all of its fullness at the end of time: “to bring all men the definitive order of justice, love and peace” (CCC 672).

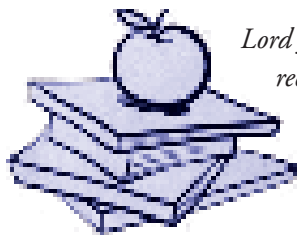
Play a video of the Hallelujah chorus of Handel’s Messiah. Videos are available at [SophiaOnline.org/HallelujahChorus](http://SophiaOnline.org/HallelujahChorus) or [SophiaOnline.org/HallelujahFlashMob](http://SophiaOnline.org/HallelujahFlashMob).



*Note: This type of music may be unfamiliar to your children. If that is the case, play it once and allow them to express any reactions, from bewilderment to amusement to dislike. After hearing them out, ask them to listen to it now a second time, putting aside any personal reactions, and this time paying attention to the sheer jubilation, awe, and praise the song expresses.*

Ask your children to think of one thing they can do to grow the Kingdom of God in their own hearts. Think of one way you can do the same, and use it as an example if they are having trouble.

Pray as a family the prayer of Pope St. John XXIII:



*Lord Jesus Christ, who are called the Prince of Peace, who are yourself our peace and reconciliation, who so often said, “Peace to you,” grant us peace. Make all men and women witnesses of truth, justice, and brotherly love. Banish from their hearts whatever might endanger peace. Enlighten our rulers that they may guarantee and defend the great gift of peace. May all peoples of the earth become as brothers and sisters. May longed-for peace blossom forth and reign always over us all.*