



With recreational use of cannabis now legal in Canada, Catholics are understandably asking themselves some questions: Is the use of cannabis now morally permissible? How should I respond to the availability of legal marijuana?

To begin, it's important to recall that Catholics look to the teachings of Jesus, Sacred Scripture and the Church for guidance on moral matters. The mere fact that an activity is made legal by the government does not automatically mean that it is morally acceptable.

It is also helpful to clarify that there are different reasons for using cannabis. Some of these uses are acceptable, while others are not.

The various drug compounds in cannabis can have legitimate therapeutic uses. For instance, they may be used as an alternative to other drugs for controlling pain or nausea. When properly dispensed for therapeutic purposes, cannabis use is acceptable.

This is no different than the use of any other medicine that helps promote health and wellbeing. If an individual thinks that the use of cannabis may be helpful for a serious health reason, then that person should consult with a physician.

Whenever possible, ways to avoid smoking cannabis should be sought, since smoking in any form is a serious health hazard. The drug compounds in cannabis can be separated from the cannabis plant and consumed in a pill/capsule form, taken as an oil, or be added to food. If cannabis is prescribed by a physician for therapeutic use, then alternatives to smoking are preferable.

Like many other drugs, marijuana also has intoxicating effects, causing users to experience a "high" often accompanied by grogginess and impaired judgement. When cannabis is used therapeutically, the resulting impairment can be accepted as a foreseen but unintended secondary effect of the drug's beneficial use.

In the Catholic tradition, the recreational use of a substance merely for its intoxicating effects, rather than therapeutically, is not permitted. Deliberate intoxication, whether through alcohol or marijuana, is wrong for several reasons.

First, people do things while drunk or high that they would not otherwise choose to do; the loss of good judgment and of natural inhibition can lead to serious harm and poor, even immoral, choices. When there is no genuine medical need for using a drug and it is used merely to cause inebriation, it is sinful behaviour.

Second, potential health consequences are also associated with the use of cannabis: some research suggests that the use of cannabis by young people under 25 may precipitate mental health disorders in those who are vulnerable.



Another concern about cannabis is that it artificially alters consciousness, which can be a way of avoiding challenges that we are facing in our lives. In such a situation, marijuana is used as a means to temporarily reduce intense psychological pain. If this is the case, an individual should seek professional medical and therapeutic support, rather than use substances as a form of self-medication to address the pain. This kind of psychological pain ought to be alleviated by legitimate means.

Fourth, some people become addicted to cannabis. When this happens, stopping its use can be difficult. In such a situation, a person may be unable to take full responsibility for their drug use, precisely because of the addiction. However, with support, it is possible for them to seek help in overcoming the addiction. Friends, family, family doctors, and clergy can offer support in finding a counsellor, therapist, or medical professional.

If you or someone close to you is using or considering using marijuana, there are several things to think about.

To start with, you might ask: is this a medical and therapeutic use of a drug? Again, consult your physician, and explore what the most appropriate treatment is for you. If there is a medical reason, then use the drug responsibly, under medical supervision.

If, on the other hand, the use of cannabis is purely recreational and not for therapeutic reasons, then such use is contrary to Catholic moral teaching. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains: “The use of drugs inflicts very grave damage on human health and life. Their use, except on strictly therapeutic grounds, is morally wrong” (n. 2291). Those who knowingly engage in this behaviour should discuss this with a priest in Confession.

If someone you love is abusing drugs – cannabis, alcohol or other substances – then that person should be assisted in getting help.

In closing, our prayer is that God, who showed compassionate love in the person of Jesus Christ, may assist each of us in our healing journey.

Given on the Feast of St. Andrew, the 30<sup>th</sup> day of November, in the Year of Our Lord, Two Thousand and Eighteen.

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