

Pastor's Column

Rev. Michael Ratajczak
michaelr@stmoside.org
758-4100 x100

Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship – A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States

This Tuesday an election will take place in California and in many other states across our country.

Will you be voting?

As Catholics, we have the responsibility and duty to be involved in the political process and to participate in shaping the moral character of our society: *“The Church’s obligation to participate in shaping the moral character of society is a requirement of our faith. It is a basic part of the mission we have received from Jesus Christ, who offers a vision of life revealed to us in Sacred Scripture and Tradition. To echo the teaching of the Second Vatican Council: Christ, the Word made flesh, in showing us the Father’s love, also shows us what it truly means to be human. Christ’s love for us lets us see our human dignity in full clarity and compels us to love our neighbors as he has loved us. Christ, the Teacher, shows us what is true and good, that is what is in accord with our human nature as free, intelligent beings created in God’s image and likeness and endowed by the Creator with dignity and rights.”*

As Pope Benedict XVI stated in *Deus Caritas Est*, *“The Church wishes to help form consciences in political life and to stimulate greater insight into the authentic requirements of justice as well as greater readiness to act accordingly, even when this might involve conflict with situations of personal interest...The Church cannot and must not take upon herself the political battle to bring about the most just society possible. She cannot and must not replace the State. Yet at the same time she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice.”*

Regarding the moral issues that are inherent to our Catholic Faith, that is, that we are “Pro-Life” from womb to tomb, we realize that neither major political party nor any of the candidates running for President are “Pro-Life” in the full Catholic sense. This, though, does not relieve us of the obligation to participate in the political process and to vote:

“Decisions about political life are complex and require the exercise of a well-formed conscience aided by prudence. This exercise of conscience begins with outright opposition to laws and other policies that violate human life or weaken its protection. Those who knowingly, willingly, and directly support public policies or legislation that undermine fundamental moral principles cooperate with evil.

Sometimes morally flawed laws already exist. In this situation, the process of framing legislation to protect life is subject to prudential judgment and ‘the art of the possible.’ At times this process may restore justice only partially or gradually. For example, Pope John Paul II taught that when a government official who fully opposes abortion cannot succeed in completely overturning a pro-abortion law, he or she may work to improve protection for unborn human life, ‘limiting the harm done by such a law’ and lessening its negative impact as much as possible. Such incremental improvements in the law are acceptable as steps toward the full restoration of justice. However, Catholics must never abandon the moral requirement to seek full protection for all human life from the moment of conception until natural death.

This “spirit” of incremental change applies to our voting efforts as well: *“Catholics often face difficult choices about how to vote. That is why it is so important to vote according to a well-formed conscience that perceives the proper relationship among moral goods. A Catholic cannot vote for a candidate who takes a position in favor of an intrinsic evil, such as abortion or racism, if the voter’s intent is to support that position. In such cases a Catholic would be guilty of formal cooperation in grave evil. At the same time, a voter should not use a candidate’s opposition to an intrinsic evil to justify indifference or inattentiveness to other important moral issues involving human life and dignity. There may be times when a Catholic who rejects a candidate’s unacceptable position may decide to vote for that candidate for other morally grave reasons. Voting in this way would be permissible only for truly grave moral reasons, not to advance narrow interests or partisan preferences or to ignore a fundamental moral evil.”*

Included in this week’s Bulletin is a “voter guide” prepared by the Office for Social Ministry of the Diocese of San Diego. Please take time to review this guide, and let it assist you in voting this Tuesday and in future elections.

(N.B. All quotes in this article are taken from the USCCB statement, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*.)

Fr. Mike