

Taking Catholic Truth to the voting booth

Objective: This fall's presidential election offers a fairly stark contrast between the two major candidates on issues Catholics are obliged to consider. Candidates for other offices, as well as various ballot initiatives, may offer similar differences. As a Catholic voter, who/what am I supposed to vote for? We as Catholic voters need to understand what direction these candidates would take our country or locale. The US bishops have recently re-released a document entitled Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship. The men of FATHERS Team should leave the meeting knowledgeable in the issues outlined in this document's introduction and be prepared to vote with fully formed consciences.

Song Suggestion: They'll Know We are Christians (Blue 476, Red 728)

Bible and Catechism Readings:

Deu 4: 1,2 and 7

Now therefore, Israel, hear the statutes and ordinances I am teaching you to observe, that you may live, and may enter in and take possession of the land which the LORD, the God of your ancestors, is giving you. In your observance of the commandments of the LORD, your God, which I am commanding you, you shall not add to what I command you nor subtract from it... For what great nation is there that has gods so close to it as the LORD, our God, is to us whenever we call upon him?

Ps 15: 1-2

One who does justice will live in the presence of the Lord. Whoever walks blamelessly and does justice; who thinks the truth in his heart and slanders not with his tongue

1 Tm 2:1-4

First of all, then, I ask that supplications, prayers, petitions, and thanksgivings be offered for everyone, for kings and for all in authority, that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all devotion and dignity. This is good and pleasing to God our savior, who wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth.

Acts 5:29

But Peter and the apostles said in reply, "We must obey God rather than men.

Catechism 1910 – 1912

Each human community possesses a common good which permits it to be recognized as such; it is in the political community that its most complete realization is found. It is the role of the state to defend and promote the common good of civil society, its citizens, and intermediate bodies. The common good is always oriented towards the progress of persons: "The order of things must be subordinate to the order of persons, and not the other way around." This order is founded on truth, built up in justice, and animated by love.

Catechism 1918

There is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God.

Catechism 1894

In accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, neither the state nor any larger society should substitute itself for the initiative and responsibility of individuals and intermediary bodies.

Saint: St. Thomas More was designated the patron saint of politicians by Pope John Paul II in 2000. As a lawyer and judge, he established the interpretation and formulation of laws (he is rightly considered one of the founders of the study of the English common law) which safeguard true social justice and build peace between individuals and nations. More eager to eliminate the causes of injustice than to repress it, he did not separate his passionate but prudent advocacy of the common good from the constant practice of charity: his fellow citizens called him the "patron of the poor." While serving all men, Saint Thomas More knew well how to serve his king, but wanted above all to serve God. On his execution by King Henry VIII in 1535, he was reported to have said: "I die the King's good servant, and God's first".

Vignette: – Matt and Ken are having a friendly conversation about the upcoming election. Matt says, "I am so tired of all of the political rhetoric! As a faithful Catholic, who am I supposed to vote for? Do I simply go with whoever is anti-abortion? The bishops say this is the 'preeminent issue'. What about immigration, marriage, poverty, and other important issues? It seems like there are no candidates that are 100% in line with Catholic teaching. What do I do?" Ken says, "You really have to do your best to develop a 'well formed conscience'." Matt says, "Sounds great, but what does that really mean?" Ken responds, "Well, I read that it really has multiple parts. They are:"

- 1) Begin by being open to the truth and what is right.
- 2) Study Sacred Scripture and the teaching of the Church.
- 3) Perhaps seek the prudent advice and good example of trusted leaders and others to support and enlighten our conscience.
- 4) Examine the facts and background information about various choices and be discerning in where we gather information.
- 5) Pray for the gifts of the Holy Spirit to help us develop our conscience, and then prayerfully reflect to discern the will of God.

Matt sighs, "Sounds like too much work. I just want a cookbook to figure it out. I have a few weeks before I have to decide. I guess I have time to give it a try."

Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion:

Do you understand the basis of the Bishops' words on: life issues, religious liberty, the definition of marriage, the economy, immigration and war/violence?

How well have your consciences been formed in prior election cycles? Are you open to hearing the guidance of the US Bishops, and putting party affiliation lower on your priority list?

What is conscience? What is prudence? How does one develop a well-formed conscience and the virtue of prudence? What role should they play in our decisions about who we vote for and how we advocate for change?

Some people question whether religion and politics should ever interact. What is the role of the Church in political life?

When has my conscience guided me to “do good and avoid evil”?

Forming conscience is a “lifelong task.” What do I do to regularly form my conscience? What more should I do?

Action Plan:

I am going to spend some quality time educating myself on Catholic teaching on the issues, the candidates and where they stand on these, and prayerfully prepare myself to vote in the upcoming election. Some resources to help me are:

USCCB - Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship

<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/> (view the Summary bulletin inserts Parts 1&2)

How to Vote Catholic – A brief guide for voters

<https://www.catholicity.com/vote/guide.html>

Should abortion be the most important issue for Catholic voters? Here’s a better question.

<https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2019/11/13/should-abortion-be-most-important-issue-catholic-voters-heres-better>

Is there a Catholic way to vote?

<http://www.uscatholic.org/articles/201810/there-catholic-way-vote-31541>

Prayer before an election

<http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/prayers-and-devotions/prayers/prayer-before-an-election.cfm>

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