

Applying our Faith to the Voting Booth

Every time we gather at Mass, we reflect on the Word of God; we pray; and we receive Jesus' Body to give us strength. But the words at the end of Mass are very important, when the deacon or priest tells us to go and announce the Gospel of the Lord, or to go forth. We are leaving and going out into the world, and what happens at Mass is meant to inform how we live. Yes, we will sin again, but hopefully we also grow in faith, hope and love so we treat and interact with others in the world in a different way.

This week, we head to the polls to make some big decisions. And my hope is we will all think carefully about the issues and how and why we vote the way we do. Especially this year, in light of the *Dobbs vs. Jackson* decision this past summer, our bishops have asked us to think in particular about the nature of justice for the unborn.

So how can we as Catholics vote wisely, not just based on personality, TV ads, or blindly circling in the box?

The first step is to make sure our consciences are formed. The Church is there to help us in that regard. Vatican II's Declaration on Religious Freedom states Catholics "must pay careful attention to the sacred and certain teaching of the Church. For the Catholic Church is, by the will of Christ, the teacher of the truth." The question for us is who informs our conscience? Raw emotion? Social media? The problem is many a Catholic can't articulate what our faith holds; it's why so many millions of those who say they are Catholic don't even understand the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. The catechism is a great tool. It will explain many a moral issue, often which crosses over into politics too, and often challenges us. As Archbishop Charles Chaput puts it, in his book "Render Unto Caesar," when this happens, *the test of a believer's honesty is his humility; that is, his willingness to put the matter to real prayer and the seriousness of his effort to accept the wisdom of the church and follow her guidance. If after this effort he still cannot reconcile himself with the teaching of the church, he must do what he believes to be right, because ultimately every Catholic must follow his or her conscience.* It's important to form it though not just based on popular opinion, or believing what we want to believe. There's also many other great spiritual writings out there on the Vatican website, and books by Catholic apologists that explain why we believe what we do. You can also read "Faithful Citizenship" from the Bishops of the United States: <https://www.usccb.org/offices/justice-peace-human-development/forming-consciences-faithful-citizenship>

With that though, there is a difference on how faith applies to political issues. Not all political issues are equal; they may deal with subjects that are more serious or less serious, more urgent or less urgent. For us as Catholics, abortion today is that issue. More than 60 million unborn children have been killed since 1973. As such, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops calls it our "preeminent priority" as faithful citizens; I'd agree as since the overturn of *Roe v. Wade*, voters have a stronger say than ever in being able to enact pro-life legislation. Closer to home, the Minnesota Bishops stated earlier in October: "*This year, in a special way, we call on Catholics to*

consider how a candidate will work for prenatal justice as a pre-eminent consideration in his or her voting calculus. Prenatal justice is not simply being anti-abortion, though that is the foundation of the pro-life witness. Prenatal justice means establishing right relationships between the mother and the unborn child in her womb, between society and the unborn child, and between society and the mother and father of the unborn child.” (You can read the whole document here:

https://www.mncatholic.org/2022_election_statement_from_the_catholic_bishops_of_minnnesota

Of course, abortion is hardly the only issue or even the only serious issue for Catholic voters to think about. But abortion is not merely one “life issue” on a menu of other, equally important ones, for two reasons.

First, because of the incomparable gravity and scope of abortion. It is the direct killing of innocent human beings—and not just any human beings but the most powerless and vulnerable human beings of all, the ones we should most try to protect. It claims more than 2,000 victims a day.

Second, because as with slavery there is only one final goal for dealing with this evil, which is ending it completely as soon as possible. With most other issues, the matter isn’t so clear cut. We all should help the poor, help the stranger, promote public health and do other social goals - but people of all political persuasions are free to disagree about the best specific policies like tax rates, welfare programs, education reforms and so on, and even as we do we can make compromises on these issues. But abortion differs in that it requires total abolition; there’s no compromise.

This is why we have pro-life voters guides, and why it’s so important to look at where candidates stand on this issue in particular. It’s also why it’s such a core component of our faith that we can’t just say because any candidate is Catholic they are pro-life; in fact any Catholic who runs for office but says they support abortion is a hypocrite.

Lastly, long after the election has come and gone, it does not mean we as Catholics stop acting. We have to open our eyes to the reality that so much of what we believe is counter cultural, both within our schools, our places of work and larger society. It’s why we need to pray for fortitude, the virtue God gives us, to be active, and to not pipe down. We have to be OK with being hated, mocked and ridiculed and gossiped about. We do so by trying to find common ground; by not seeing our political opponents as an enemy, but as people created in God’s image; through listening and dialogue, but also through articulating our beliefs through arguments, not just shouting. Whether trying to help someone find the right way in life, or talking about these issues with others or even on social media trying to actually argue rather than shout, we cannot fear being hated for the sake of the Gospel if we truly believe the mission of the Church is salvation of souls. With that, let us also not hate others who are politically different than we are, but find common ground, and together try to build a better nation.

Have a very blessed week!

Fr. Paul