How our Faith Informs our Politics

I've always been passionate about politics, so much so that it was my major at the U of M. I volunteered a bit on a campaign in 2000, and loved government class in high school. So obsessed was I that on the way home from work in 2000, I'd stop at a library to check polling data that was released at noon every day (no smart phones back then) as Election Day neared.

That said while I'm still interested in politics a great deal, on social media, I generally post homilies or bird and nature photos as photography is my favorite hobby, rather than pose political issues or rant on this or that, for what is really the point in a political back and forth on social media?

Obviously I'm not working on campaigns now (well our upcoming capital campaign for the parish, if you can spare $3 million to pay off remaining debts, please call me and we'll give you a really nice T-shirt). But I still love political talk shows, and in between Masses on Sundays over breakfast put on Sunday morning political shows, and sometimes listen to political talk on the radio while driving or watch some political shows at night.

A little over a week ago, we were all shocked by the attempted assassination of former president Donald Trump as he was speaking at a rally. At the time I write this the full facts were still being sorted out, and likely will take some time.

However what we all know is that politics can get people riled up a bit. I certainly have strong opinions and don't mind expressing them, but one of the things I've come to appreciate is that one has to think about how we do this. Just yelling or typing random things on social media to attack people who disagree with me really is pointless. But this does not mean that being politically active is not important; quite the contrary. We do have to talk "politics and religion" as these two often do in fact mix, but we are both active as Americans and Catholics. We should not fear speaking what we believe and why we believe it. That said, I think what we need is to strive to find a way to learn how to engage with the world and think about the issues while not letting our emotions and passions get the best of us.

Hopefully, we see a greater good in love of country, and try our best to not hate others for their beliefs, and live out what Jesus tells us, namely to love one another as He loves us. This does not mean we like one another all the time, or that we can't disagree strongly with positions taken by others, but hopefully we can see people first as humans and Americans, not just for their political beliefs. There is a lot of polarization out there (though this isn't new - just read about the times leading up the Civil War, or how German-Americans were treated during World War I, or the internment of Japanese Americans). Division is part of original sin - going back to the garden (the serpent gave it to me, that woman you put here, it's her fault, I listened to her). But hopefully grace operates on us so we can work past it.

A few things I've tried to live by that I think are good for us all:

1) See others through the eyes of God as much as possible; sometimes easier said than done, but seeing them first in that way is what John Paul II called the "Personalistic Norm," meaning it's a blueprint for how to live. I make an effort each night to pray for both Presidents Donald Trump and Joe Biden, and will do so through the election. We apply this to people we both like and don't like in the office at school and in our world.

2) Listen before shouting or typing on social media or clicking "send". We might disagree, but at least listen to the other's viewpoint.

3) Argue; it doesn't mean shout, but it means have a conversation. It means "Here's what I believe and why," forming points leading to a conclusion. A person might not agree with me, but I'm happy to explain why I am voting for someone or why I feel strongly about an issue.

4) Passion isn't a bad thing as Rod Stewart might say - I am passionate about many things and that's a good thing for us to have. But, don't let it turn into hate. Sometimes I hear in confessions people being so angry at this or that politician, or they really are angry and don't like the pope, or they are angry at people who are Democrat or Republican, but I remind them maybe talk to that person, or pray for them, and try to let it go.

5) Pray for the "other side"

6) Sometimes it's fine to agree to disagree. But why end friendships over it? One of my closest friends has very different political views than I do, and so did Henry Fonda and Jimmy Stewart; I read once they got into a fight but then let it go, and had a life-long friendship. Knowing someone a long time, it's not as if one can't talk about some political things, but is it worth it to end a friendship because you vote for different people? I've heard from people who have dealt with just that. How sad. I have had to block a few people on social media over the years or delete comments because I don't want my own social media pages turning into a political back and forth with snide comments.

7) Sometimes politics and religion do cross paths; and so that is why Catholics do speak politically on issues, some being very important issues. It's why you'll see Catholics in front of a Planned Parenthood, and also you saw Catholics marching with people of different faiths across races during the Civil Rights Movement, or praying outside a prison if a person is about to be put to death in a Capital Punishment state. Some issues the Church takes no real position on, but many do and are on a hierarchy. So just as I will every so often speak on these things, we too can't be afraid to.

8) Pray for our nation and be active. No matter your beliefs, think about the issues and be sure to vote, even in "off year" elections. Read about the city council candidate, the school board candidate, because all of these offices matter. Talk about what you

believe with others and why you believe it.

At this point I'll be voting the same way I always have based on the issues I care most about and which people represent that; I've voted pretty much the same way since I started voting in 1996, but am blessed to know people across the political spectrum with whom I am friends, and the last time I checked there were not parishes set up based on one being Republican or Democrat, or a more of a fan of Pope Francis or Pope Benedict XVI or John Paul II. I'm very blessed to know people though from many different walks of life, so never forget when you get riled up, have a conversation, and maybe agree to disagree if it comes to that. Listen, talk, converse, but don't let hate and anger take over.

I am very glad President Trump was not seriously harmed, and hopefully no matter what happens in November we can move forward recognizing what a great thing freedom is, as is our country, and work for what we believe in and who we want to win elections, while always thinking of the higher good and not letting anger turn into hate with those whom we disagree.

Have a blessed week,

Fr. Paul