

“Vote Your Faith”

30th Sunday of Ordinary Time [C]

Sir 35:12-14, 16-18; Ps 34:2-3, 17-18, 19, 23; 2 Tim 4:6-8,16-18; 2 Cor 5:19; Lk 18:9-14

Well, here we are, only about two weeks out from the presidential election...

- The debates are over; soon we’ll be heading to the voting booth...

So I ask you today: Are you excited about your choices?

- Not so much? Me neither!
- and I have yet to personally meet anyone who IS excited!

Recently, as my head was spinning at the seemingly daily revelations of a new scandal

- on both sides of the ticket (!)
- I was reminded of this scripture from Psalms 36:

“There is no fear of God before his eyes.

He so flatters himself in his mind

that he knows not his guilt.

In his mouth are mischief and deceit.

All wisdom is gone.”

(Ps 36:1b-4)

Unfortunately, this is where we seem to be as a country today

- but lest we fall into the “holier than thou” mentality of the Pharisee
 - that Jesus was so critical of today’s Gospel

Let us come to grips with a bit of truth:

- Our presidential candidates are in many ways
 - the logical products of our country’s direction.
 - As Jesus said, *“by their fruits shall ye know them”* (Mt 7:16)
 - In these candidates we get an unflattering snapshot of our country (!)
 - That’s a sobering (if not embarrassing) reality to embrace.
 - And as we bemoan the stench of our rotten fruit
 - we should consider another Scripture:
 - *“God is not mocked; you reap what you sow”* (Gal 6:7)

Indeed, we as a country are a LOT like the Pharisee in today's Gospel reading

- who stood self-righteously before God,
 - at best feigning humility,
 - praising himself vice God, and looking down his nose at others
- He was, as Jesus said, praying with himself.

Then Jesus concluded his parable saying:

"Whoever exalts himself will be humbled. Whoever humbles himself will be exalted." (Lk 18:14)

Whoever exalts himself will be humbled... Today, our country as a whole

- after generations of giving little more
 - than mere lip-service to following God,
- is in the process of being humbled.

We are not puppets. We have free will.

- And God will always allow us to ignore His will
 - and walk down that broad *"road that leads to destruction"* (Mt 7:13)

And so we have walked down that road.

- And we see how our country has become increasingly unhinged,
- increasingly divided by class, race, and faith
- We see signs of widespread denigration of others
- signs of scandal and collusion
- continuing attempts to erode religious freedom
- attacks on Christianity (and in a special way: Catholicism)
 - what some have called outright religious bigotry

The depth of this quagmire has spurred several American bishops to speak out.

Louisville Archbishop Joseph Kurtz

- President of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops
- (hails from the same hometown as our pastor: Mahanoy City, PA)
- Within the last two weeks noted that much of the political discourse in this election
 - *"demeaned women and marginalized people of faith."*

- *“There have been recent reports that some may have sought to interfere in the internal life of the Church for short-term political gain. If true, this is troubling both for the well-being of faith communities and the good of our country.”*
- Our beliefs come *“from Jesus, not a consensus forged by contemporary norms.”*
- *“... we can and will do better as a nation”* (Catholic News Service, 14 Oct 16)

To that I say, “Amen!” And it’s always encouraging when our priests & bishops take a public stand against the headwinds of this secular world.

For many in American politics, the Catholic Church’s views on Morality

- are but a persistent headache
- a lingering vestige of the Middle Ages
- an obstacle to be overcome in their self-righteous march called *“Progressivism”*

Indeed, morality has been traded for votes and power -- power at all costs

- where the end absolutely justifies the means.

Through all of this, we as voters can become discouraged.

Yet, despite these trials – our Catechism reminds us that we as Catholics have

- a moral obligation to vote. (CCC 2240)

So, the question on many people’s minds is:

- Who should I vote for? (Or perhaps: Who should I vote *against*?)

Well the Church cannot and will not specifically answer that question.

- However, the Church can and does help you acquire
 - a “well-formed conscience”
 - so that you may make your own choices
 - based on God’s truths.

The Church does this thru a variety of means.

For example, on our church website and in this week’s bulletin,

- Fr. John has referenced a link to an archdiocese webpage
 - featuring several helpful documents:
 - One that I draw heavily from in this homily
 - “Forming Consciences for Faithful Catholics”
 - a 42-page document by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.
 - These documents, and others

- offer a great deal of solid information
- and I strongly encourage you to prayerfully study them before voting.

In this political season there is no shortage of very important social moral issues.

And on many of them,

- such as: immigration, education, health care, national security
 - helping the poor, managing the economy, protecting the environment
- we as Catholics may legitimately take different approaches in solving them.
- For example: while we should all agree to try to reduce poverty
 - or have fair immigration policies,
 - we may disagree on the best way to go about that.
- We use the term “prudential judgment” to express our differences of opinion in HOW we go about solving such moral problems.
- Prudential judgment applies where we agree on the moral *principle*,
 - but may disagree on the *application* of that moral principle.

But prudential judgment by no means implies all issues are equal – or that it’s okay to disagree on all issues...

- There are some actions we must never take -- as individuals or as a society,
 - because they are always *incompatible* with love of God and neighbor.
 - We call such actions “intrinsically evil”
- The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops teaches us that
 - Intrinsically evil actions must always be rejected
 - and must never be supported or condoned. (USCCB, Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship [FCFC])
- A few prime examples are
 - the intentional taking of innocent human life
 - embryonic stem-cell research, and same-sex marriage.

The very *core* of Catholic moral and social teaching can be boiled down to just seven words:

- **“respect for the dignity of every person”**

It is thru this lens that the Church looks when considering *any* matter of social justice.

The most basic and *fundamental* right -- and the condition for all other personal rights --

- is the ***right to life***.
- St. Pope John Paul II once wrote that:
 - Cries are justly made for other human rights s.a.
 - the right to basic health care, to home, to work, to family, to culture
 - But, he says
 - if you're fighting for *those* rights and not defending the right to life
 - with *maximum determination*...
 - your outcry is *false* and an *illusion*. (*Apostolic Exhortation Christifideles Laici (On the Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World)*, December 30, 1988)

In defending the "right to life" we are chiefly fighting against two issues:

- Abortion and Euthanasia.
 - Our Catholic bishops remind us that
 - over one million human lives are taken each year by abortion in the U.S.
 - over 58 million since *Roe v. Wade* was passed in 1973. (USCCB, FCFC; <http://www.christianliferesources.com/article/u-s-abortion-statistics-by-year-1973-current-1042>)
 - Compare that to the numbers of deaths
 - due to gun-related violence – approaching a staggering 35,000 per year
 - And there's widespread & justifiable outcry
 - to bring those numbers down.
 - Yet abortion kills more than that every 2 weeks...
 - Our nation often suffers from selective outrage.
 - St. Pope John Paul also wrote that, regarding a law permitting abortions,
 - it is "*never licit to obey it, or to take part in a propaganda campaign in favor of such a law, or to vote for [such a law]*" (*Evangelium Vitae*, EV 73, St. Pope John Paul).

Euthanasia is

- often given the label of "mercy killing" in order to make it sound humane.
- The ill or elderly are killed, by either direct action or intentional neglect,
- This is often done, as St. Pope John Paul also wrote,
 - out of a misplaced sense of compassion
 - But true compassion cannot include intentionally doing something
 - intrinsically evil to another person (*Evangelium Vitae*, EV 73, St. Pope John Paul).

Embryonic Stem Cell Research

- Morally, human embryos are human persons and as such should not be destroyed.
- Medically, very fortunately, adult stem cells can be obtained without doing harm to the person.
 - Thus there is not even a valid *medical* argument for using embryonic stem cells.

The bottom line on all “right to life” issues is this, in the words of our U.S. bishops:

- The direct and intentional destruction of innocent human life
- from the moment of conception until natural death
- is always wrong and must always be opposed. (USCCB, FCFC)

Same-sex Marriage

On this issue our bishops rather succinctly remind us that the family

- is based on marriage between a man and a woman,
- is the basic cell of human society,
- is a sanctuary for the creation and nurturing of children,
- and it should be defended and strengthened, not undermined or distorted.
- Therefore, they say, redefining marriage to deny its essential meaning
 - can never be justified. (USCCB, FCFC)

These issues are by no means a conclusive list of intrinsic evils

- but these are often at the forefront because
- they strike at the very foundation of life and family.

Among the many other important issues before us this year,

- we would be remiss to overlook the significant impact this election will have
 - on the future of the U.S. Supreme Court.
- The next President will be nominating at least one judge
 - to serve on our nation’s highest court.
- I remind you that all Supreme Court decisions in the last several years
 - having significant moral consequence
 - (cases related to abortion, Obamacare, religious liberties)
 - They were decided by close votes of 5-4...
- The next President will truly chart a moral direction for our country with ramifications
 - far beyond their term and with generational influence.

On all of these most serious issues, as with other issues of moral consequence,

- the differences between the two parties & candidates are clear
 - often *strikingly* so.

In the end, how we vote is a decision to be made by each of us, individually,

- hopefully guided by a well-formed conscience based Catholic moral teaching.

Do your homework! Our vote is an obligation we must not take lightly

- it is truly an opportunity for us to confront evil in our society.

CONCLUSION

When we take into account all of Jesus’ teachings...

- Apart from faith & love,
- more than *anything* else, He spoke of the need for prayer ...

Over the last two weeks, Christ taught us to pray with perseverance & faith.

- Today He emphasizes praying with humility of heart.

In these challenging political times

- We dare not stand any longer with self-righteous pride before God
- Instead, may we approach our Creator like the sorrowful tax collector:

Today, let us draw together as individuals, as families, as a parish, as a nation

- and drop to our collective knees
 - bowing low before our Almighty God
 - and repent... *“God be merciful on me, a sinner...”*

Then may we take solace in the words from our first reading:

“The prayer of the humble pierces the clouds” (Sir 35:17)

Pray with great humility my brothers & sisters

- and then vote your faith!

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