

Preaching and Catechesis During Election Season

As our nation prepares for the upcoming political elections we have an opportunity, in our preaching and catechesis, to assist our congregations in exercising faithful citizenship – engaging their civic and political responsibilities with Gospel eyes.

A common misconception, even among Catholics, is that religion has no place in our public lives. But, while Jesus did not come to establish a political kingdom, he did call us to full-time discipleship. Therefore we can challenge every Catholic to bear witness to Christian truths, values and convictions in public life (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1913-1915*).

1. Pertinent Issues

In our preaching and catechesis it is important that we address all issues that are pertinent to the elections. At the same time it is important to remember that, among all the issues, there is an order of priority. All issues do not have the same weight.

Accordingly, the US Bishops advise us to avoid the error of “a moral equivalence that makes no ethical distinctions between different kinds of issues.” (Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship #28). For example, the Bishops highlight some things “we must never do, as individuals or as a society, because they are always incompatible with love of God and neighbor.” Foremost among these are: abortion, euthanasia, human cloning, embryo destructive research, and the redefinition of marriage. These issues “must always be rejected and opposed, and must never be supported or condoned.” (Forming Consciences #22-23)

At the same time the Bishops instruct us to avoid “the misuse of these necessary moral distinctions as a way of dismissing or ignoring other serious threats to life and dignity.” (#29) For example: environmental degradation, racism, the use of the death penalty, unjust war, lack of health care, unjust immigration policy and others “are serious moral issues that challenge our consciences and require us to act.” Decisions about how best to address these issues are matters of legitimate debate, but they are not optional concerns.

2. Candidates

How are these issues addressed by the candidates, and which candidates are best equipped to address them?

It almost goes without saying that we do not endorse a party or a candidate. This is not simply a matter of preserving the Church’s tax-exempt status. It is fundamentally about protecting the dignity of each person’s conscience.

Therefore we must assist our congregations to pray, study and reflect over the merits of the different policy approaches proposed by candidates. We call the faithful to discern – with consciences well formed by Church teaching, and duly informed by candidates’ positions and voting records – how best to cast their votes.

3. Prayer and Action

In our pastoral role we call the faithful to prepare for the political process and election in the following ways -

- a. Be informed of the issues and the candidates’ positions on those issues.
- b. Consider this information with a well-formed conscience through prayer, conversation and the gift of faith.
- c. Be involved in the election process: i.e. pray for our public servants; evaluate politicians and their policies in light of faith principles and the common good; promote voter registration, etc.
- d. Exercise the civic duty to vote.

Resources

- *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, United States Catholic Conference of Bishops (USCCB)
- The *Good News* publication produced by the Missouri Catholic Conference
- For Do’s and Don’ts during Election Season, go to the USCCB website: www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/dos-and-donts-guidelines-during-election-season.cfm.