

FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP
HOMILY NOTES
TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
September 2, 2012
“Conscience Formation for Citizens”

Introduction:

- When is the last time you had a big or important decision to make—a time when you were trying to determine the “right” thing to do amidst a number of choices?
- What was the process that you went through to try and determine what choice was right?
- Today’s readings encourage us to think about what we call “conscience.”
- According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, conscience is a judgment of practical reason that helps us to recognize and seek what is good, and to reject what is evil (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1796).
- Conscience is not just a “feeling” we have that is an excuse for doing whatever we “feel”; rather, it is a gift that God gives us which must be continually formed and renewed.
- Today’s readings give us some important insights about forming our consciences.

First Reading: Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-8

vs. 1: “Now, Israel, hear the statutes and decrees which I am teaching you to observe, that you may live.”

vs. 7: “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?”

- The first reading from Deuteronomy asks, “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?” This passage affirms God’s faithfulness to us—his promise to be with us as we “search” for what is right with a sincere heart. For our part, we have to approach our searching with a sincere heart and a willingness to seek the truth. If we do these things, we can trust that the Holy Spirit will be with us.
- The first reading, from Deuteronomy, also emphasizes the “statutes and decrees” that God has given the Israelites. Later in Deuteronomy, the author says that these statutes and decrees are given so “that you and your descendants may live” (30:19).
- In order to consider what is right in a given situation, we have to first be aware of what both Scripture and Church teaching says about a particular issue. What are the “statutes and decrees” that allow the unborn, vulnerable, poor, and sick to “live”?

Responsorial Psalm 15:2-3, 3-4, 4-5

vs. 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.”

- Today’s Psalm emphasizes the importance of “doing justice.” When we have to make a decision about something, we should also explore what is “just.” How this or that choice

will enhance—not degrade—the life and dignity of each person made in the image of God. We especially have a duty to act to defend the weak, unborn, poor, and migrant.

- We must examine the facts and background of the situation and consider what is just and right to do.

Second Reading: James 1:17-18, 21b-22, 27

vs. 21: “Humbly welcome the word that has been planted in you and is able to save your souls.”

- Another aspect to forming our consciences is prayer and reflection. We must strive to hear “the voice of God resounding in the human heart, revealing the truth to us and calling us to do what is good while shunning what is evil” (U.S. Catholic Bishops, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, no. 17).
- Being attentive to God’s voice requires that we take regular time for prayer, and that we bring with us to our prayer and reflection time the important decisions that we face.

Gospel: Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

vs. 6: “*This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.*”

- Referencing Isaiah 29:13, in the Gospel today, Jesus criticizes those who honor God with their lips but whose hearts are far from him.
- Conscience formation is not about going through the motions, or about searching for evidence to support a decision you have already made. It is about taking seriously our lifelong obligation to do what is required to continually form our consciences.
- In summary, this requires:
 - o A sincere **desire** to embrace goodness and truth.
 - o **Study** of Sacred Scripture and the teaching of the Church (as contained in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*).
 - o **Examination** of the facts and background information about various choices.
 - o Prayerful **reflection** to discern the will of God (*Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, no. 18).

Application

We are challenged to examine issues and choices and to continue to form our consciences.

In their statement, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, the bishops name a number of issues about which we should form our consciences. Some of these include:

- Continuing destruction of unborn children through abortion and other threats to the lives and dignity of others who are vulnerable, sick, or unwanted;
- Renewed efforts to force Catholic ministries—in health care, education, and social services—to violate their consciences or stop serving those in need;
- Efforts to redefine marriage and enact measures which undermine marriage as between one man and one woman and an institution essential to the common good;
- An economic crisis which has devastated lives and livelihoods, increasing unemployment, poverty, hunger, deficits and debt, and the duty to respond in ways that protect the poor and future generations;

- The failure to repair a broken immigration system with comprehensive measures that promote respect for law, human rights and the dignity of immigrants and refugees, and which keep families together, and advance the common good;
- Wars, terror, and violence which raise serious moral questions about the human and moral costs of force, particularly in regards to the Holy Land and Middle East.

I am reading, and encourage you to read, the bishops' statement, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, in full. It is available on the U.S. bishops' website and the web address is in today's bulletin.

If “politics” is not about fundamental values—life and death, war and peace, who moves ahead and who gets left behind—then it is just about money or power. Let our faith shape our politics and not the other way around. Join me in trying to form and act on our consciences in this election year. It is our duty as faithful citizens!

Sample Bulletin Announcement

Catholics Care. Catholics Vote. Form your conscience.

In their statement on *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, the U.S. Catholic bishops urge Catholics to form their consciences through being open to truth, studying Scripture and Church teaching, examining facts and background information, and prayerful reflection (no. 18). Visit www.faithfulcitizenship.org to learn about the steps you can take to form your conscience and to watch videos, download podcasts, and access other great resources on conscience formation for faithful citizens.

Bulletin Insert

On September 1-2 weekend, parishes may also wish to use this [bulletin insert](#) on conscience formation, found in the “Parishes and Schools” section of www.faithfulcitizenship.org.