

FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP
HOMILY NOTES
TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
September 30, 2012
“Civil Dialogue”

Introduction:

- In a little more than a month, we will go to the polls to elect the president for the next four years.
- Sadly, the climate in our country right now is one in which these things are commonplace: inflammatory rhetoric, uncivil accusations, personal attacks, and unrelenting questioning of others’ motives.
- As Catholics, how are we a part of all this? How do we respond?
- The readings today challenge us to view others as brothers and sisters in Christ—members of one family, the Body of Christ.
- This calls us to think and act differently, and challenges us to approach dialogue with a spirit of love and respect.

First Reading: Num. 11:25-29

vs. 29-30: "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the people of the LORD were prophets! Would that the LORD might bestow his spirit on them all!"

- The first reading, from the book of Numbers, tells about a disagreement that arises among the Israelites. They have been wandering in the desert on their way from Egypt to the Promised Land. The people have grown weary and after Moses pleads with God for help, God bestows his Spirit on seventy leaders who are gathered in the tent, so that they can encourage and help those who are weary. However, divisions arise between the leaders, even after they all received God’s spirit.
- Although not a perfect analogy, the story is a good lead-in to today’s homily theme: the importance of respectful discussion and civil dialogue.
- How often do we “murmur among ourselves” about someone else, especially a public leader? How often do we unjustly question the motives of others, or even attack or make fun of someone else? How often do we jump to conclusions about others who may be honestly seeking to do good but in a different way and with a different perspective from us?

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 19:8, 10, 12-13, 14

v. 8: “The law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul; the decree of the LORD is trustworthy, giving wisdom to the simple.”

- Giving others the benefit of the doubt, not doubting their motives, and approaching them with a willingness to listen and understand does *not* mean that we are saying that “everyone is right” or that there is no fundamental truth or clear moral requirement.

- On the contrary, we believe that God gives us a “perfect law” that we must follow. As the Psalm proclaims, “The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul.” Thus, we do *not* believe in relativism, that there is no objective right or wrong.
- What we *do* believe in is:
 - Examining the tone and tenor of our debate, refusing to disparage the name and reputation, the character and life, of a person simply because he or she holds a different position.
 - Refusing to spread falsehoods, or half-truths, about one another. We must remember that the commandment that obliges us to avoid false witness also calls us to be people who tell the truth.
 - Rejecting the temptation to select only some facts, choose inflammatory words, spin the story, or be used for someone else’s political purpose.
 - Recognizing that although we are each individuals, we are called to live out our lives in relationship with others, in community, and we must work to strengthen, not erode, that sense of community.
 - Being people who express our thoughts, opinions, and positions – but always do so in love and truth.

Second Reading: James 5:1-6

v. 4: “Behold, the wages you withheld from the workers who harvested your fields are crying aloud; and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.”

- In the second reading, James writes to an early Christian community, criticizing the divisions among them. To the owners of the fields, he writes, “Behold, the wages you withheld from the workers who harvested your field are crying aloud; and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.”
- We live in a society with some of these same divisions: rich vs. poor; owners vs. workers; social and ethnic divisions, etc. What other factors divide us? Democrat vs. Republican? Conservative vs. Liberal?
- When are you tempted to play into the divisions in our society? How are we one family of faith—all children of God?

Gospel: Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48

v. 42 "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were put around his neck and he were thrown into the sea."

- The divisions among us and the disrespect we show toward one another are a cause of scandal for others.
- When others—our neighbors, our friends, our children, people who read our comments on Facebook pages, blogs or email—see us disrespecting one another, this weakens the witness of our Church. As Jesus says in today’s Gospel: “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were put around his neck and he were thrown into the sea.”

Application:

- We have many ways we choose to divide ourselves, but we have something in common: we are all children of God, and we are called to treat one another and all God’s children with respect and understanding.
- How can we overcome division? How can we respect and support the dignity of others?
- In the midst of election season when dialogue is often anything but civil, here are some ideas for how we can be vehicles of Christ’s love when we talk with others, including those with whom we disagree:
 - We should begin with respect.
 - We should decide not to degrade the persons, characters, and reputations of others who hold different positions from us, or spread rumors, falsehoods or half-truths about them.
 - We should be careful about the language we use, avoiding inflammatory words and rhetoric.
 - We should not to assign motives to others. Instead, we should assume that our family-members, friends and colleagues are speaking in good faith, even if we disagree with them.
 - We should listen carefully and respectfully to other people.
 - We should remember that we are members of a community, and we should try to strengthen our sense of community through the love and care we show one another.
 - Finally, we should be people who express our thoughts, opinions, and positions – but always do so in love and truth.

I encourage you to visit the United States Catholic Bishops’ website at faithfulcitizenship.org. The web address is in the bulletin today. There, you can find some resources on how we can promote civil dialogue during election season—and all year round.

If we can model Christ’s love in our civil dialogue, we can begin to change the negative climate in our country during this election season, and beyond.

Sample Bulletin Announcement

Catholics Care. Catholics Vote. Practice civil dialogue.

In their statement on *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, the U.S. Catholic bishops remind Catholics that we are called to engage in charitable, respectful and civil dialogue during election season. In a culture that is dominated by “partisan attacks, sound bites and media hype,” the Church calls for “a different kind of political engagement” (no. 14). Visit www.faithfulcitizenship.org to access resources on civil dialogue and on how your faith calls you to engage during election season and beyond.

Bulletin Insert

On September 29-30 weekend, parishes may also wish to use the [bulletin insert](#) on civil dialogue, found in the “Parishes and Schools” section of www.faithfulcitizenship.org.