

FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP
HOMILY NOTES
THIRTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
November 4, 2012
“Our Commitment to Faithful Citizenship”

Introduction:

- Right now, we are in the last few days before the presidential elections. The last several months have been filled with speeches, debates, campaign ads, conflict, and controversy.
- Today’s Scripture readings are perfect timing. In the midst of this climate, they are a breath of fresh air to remind us that God is the center of our existence, and that we are called to make him the foundation of our lives.
- This does not mean that we are to separate ourselves from the world and focus exclusively on God. Rather, as the Gospel points out, love of God and love of neighbor are united, and both are our task as believers.
- What does this mean for us as Catholics in this election?

Let’s begin by taking a look at the first two readings:

First Reading: Deuteronomy 6:2-6

vs. 2: “Fear the LORD, your God, and keep, throughout the days of your lives, all his statutes and commandments which I enjoin on you, and thus have long life.”

Responsorial Psalm 18:2-3, 3-4, 47, 51

vs. 2: “I love you, O Lord, my strength, O Lord, my rock, my fortress, my deliverer.”

- The first reading, from Deuteronomy, and today’s Psalm, remind us that God is the foundation for our lives – we owe to him everything that we are. We are reminded that all that we have is a gift and we express our gratitude through the way we live our lives, the decisions we make, and how we treat others. In this election, we should look to our faith and remember that the Lord is our strength, our rock, our deliverer.

Second Reading: Hebrews 7:23-28

vv. 23-24: “The law appoints men subject to weakness to be high priests, but the word of the oath, which was taken after the law, appoints a son, who has been made perfect forever.”

- The primacy of our faith is an important idea as we approach the elections, which are only a few days away.
- As we approach the elections, tensions often rise high. We may feel particularly passionate about one candidate or another.

- Or, we may feel anxious, not knowing who to vote for, not really feeling that any candidate fully reflects Catholic teaching.
- As Paul recognizes, no human being—apart from the person of Jesus, who is also divine—is perfect. In his letter to the Hebrews, Paul contrasts the high priests, who, though holy, were also “subject to weakness,” with Jesus, who is perfect. This reflection reminds us as the election approaches that we cannot put our hope wholly in any human being, or in any candidate, or any party. In fact, our loyalty is first to God and his laws.
- Thus, the bishops warn us, in their statement, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, that:

As Catholics, we should be guided more by our moral convictions than by our attachment to a political party or interest group. When necessary, our participation should help transform the party to which we belong; we should not let the party transform us in such a way that we neglect or deny fundamental moral truths (no. 14).

- The Catholic social teaching framework “does not easily fit ideologies of ‘right’ or ‘left,’ ‘liberal’ or ‘conservative,’ or the platform of any political party” (no. 55).
- Our loyalty is ultimately to God and the values of our faith and this can make us feel like we are “between two worlds” because none of the options we have to choose from fully embody Catholic teaching.

Gospel: Mark 12:28b-34

vv. 38-31: “One of the scribes came to Jesus and asked him, “Which is the first of all the commandments?” Jesus replied, “The first is this: *Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.* The second is this: *You shall love your neighbor as yourself.* There is no other commandment greater than these.”

- Knowing that our true loyalty is to God might make us feel as if we simply shouldn’t vote at all. Yet, we are challenged by the words of the Gospel reading, in which Jesus proclaims the *two* most important commandments: Love of God *and* love of neighbor.
- One way that we live out our love of God is through our love for our neighbors. Catholic teaching calls us to do all that we can to protect the rights and dignity of all, *especially those who are poor and vulnerable.*
- Christ calls us to love *both* God *and* neighbor. Loving God above all things makes it possible for us to love our neighbor rightly and justly. As we strive to apply our Catholic moral and social teachings to the political decisions and issues before us, we seek to make choices that allow us to best live out love for our neighbors.

Application:

Who is my neighbor?

The unborn child. The poor family. The elderly person. The immigrant in our midst. The victim of war. We are called to give special attention to those who are vulnerable or marginalized in any way.

In their statement on *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, the U.S. Catholic bishops highlight these pressing issues that affect our neighbors:

- **Abortion** and other threats to life and dignity.
- Efforts to force Catholic ministries to violate their **consciences** or stop serving those in need;
- Efforts to redefine **marriage** and 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, and the duty to respond in ways that protect the **poor** and future generations;
- The failure to repair a broken **immigration** system in ways that respect the law, human rights, the dignity of immigrants and refugees, families, and the common good.
- **Wars, terror, and violence** which raise serious moral questions about the human and moral costs of force.

As we prepare to go to the polls this week, we can keep these words from the bishops in mind:

“Catholic voters should use the framework of Catholic teaching to examine candidates’ positions on issues affecting human life and dignity as well as issues of justice and peace, and they should consider candidates’ integrity, philosophy, and performance. It is important for all citizens to see beyond party politics, to analyze campaign rhetoric critically, and to choose their political leaders according to principle, not party affiliation or mere self-interest’ (Living the Gospel of Life, no. 33)” (Faithful Citizenship, 41).

As Catholics, we believe that *“responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation (Faithful Citizenship, 13).* By voting, we can defend human life and marriage and care for the needs of the most vulnerable members of our society: the unborn, the poor, the unemployed, the elderly, the homeless, and the immigrant. They need us to speak on their behalf.

In their introductory note to *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, the bishops note that Catholics must make “important distinctions among moral issues acknowledging that some of these issues involve the clear obligation to oppose intrinsic evils which can never be justified and that others require action to pursue justice and promote the common good.”

Put your faith in action by voting this Tuesday, November 6. But remember that Catholics’ responsibility to be involved in political life does not end after the elections. As the bishops write:

“Forming their consciences in accord with Catholic teaching, Catholic lay women and men can become actively involved: running for office; working within political

parties; communicating their concerns and positions to elected officials; and joining diocesan social mission or advocacy networks, state Catholic conference initiatives, community organizations, and other efforts to apply authentic moral teaching in the public square” (no. 16).

Christ calls us to love both God and neighbor. One way we do so is through informed participation in political life. Join me in forming your conscience, praying, reflecting, voting in Tuesday’s election, and then continuing to participate in political life all year round.

Sample Bulletin Announcement:

Remember to Vote... Be a Faithful Citizen.

Visit www.faithfulcitizenship.org to explore how you can love your neighbors by advocating as a faithful citizen on behalf of those who are poor and vulnerable. As you prepare to vote this week, read the U.S. bishops’ statement on *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, watch videos, download podcasts, and access other great resources on faithful citizenship.