FAITH BEFORE POLITICS.

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Examination of Conscience: Loving Our Neighbors in the Public Square

"The Church is present in the world as a sign of unity for the entire human family. She recognizes… her particular vocation of listening, dialogue and service, and of being responsive to everything concerning the lives of contemporary men and women."
– Pope Leo XIV, *Magnifica humanitas*, no. 19

Pope Leo XIV in *Magnifica humanitas,* invites us to build the civilization of love (no. 187). In doing so, he reminds us that the Church's mission takes place in the midst of the questions, struggles, and relationships of contemporary life. The Church is called not simply to speak to the world, but to listen, and "to build bridges, to break down walls, to sow seeds of reconciliation" (*Fratelli tutti,* no. 276).

So then, how are we to be builders of the civilization of love, breakers of walls, and signs of unity especially in an atmosphere where vitriol and personal attacks have become more common? How do Pope Leo's words challenge us to engage differently? Through prayer and reflection, formed consciences and honest dialogue, we can bring the convictions of our faith to bear on our participation in civic life, and in our communities.

Use this reflection to help you think and pray about where God is calling you to be a sign of unity in your family, community, and even in your engagement online. Where can you better engage in honest dialogue and bridge-building?

> "*We must all, therefore, examine our conscience regarding the words we use, the prejudices we have and the explicit or implicit aggression that lies within them. We have a real opportunity to contribute to the common good each time we speak the truth, offer wise advice, support those in need of comfort, denounce injustice and give a voice to the voiceless*" (*Magnifica humanitas*, no. 214).

Begin with Scripture and Prayer

Begin by reading Isaiah 43:19 "Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?"

First, consider: what are the new things God is doing in your community and how can you participate in God's call to be an agent for justice and mercy? Then, use this prayer and ask God to be present with you during this time of reflection.

Prayer for Life and Dignity of the Human Person

Now spend some time in prayerful reflection.

1. What stories from my community have left an impression on me and led me to ask, "What can I do to change this?" Where have I been called to action? What issues or injustices have I felt drawn to work on in my community?

2. In the past, how have I engaged or disengaged in efforts to address issues I care about, including through engagement in the political process as a faithful citizen? What has drawn me towards or away from engagement?

3. What perspectives on issues impacting our local and global communities elicit strong negative reactions in me? What is at the root of that feeling or why do I feel the way I do?

4. When have I allowed that strong feeling to cause me to say or think something unkind about another person? Specifically:

    - *On social media:* When has my engagement with (or about) those with whom I disagree failed to recognize their dignity as persons created in the image of God?

    - *In conversations*: When was I so focused on winning an argument that I failed to genuinely listen? When was my choice of words uncharitable? When did I paint others in disrespectful ways or engage in personal attacks?

    - *In my day-to-day perceptions and attitudes:* When have I made assumptions about or failed to give the benefit of the doubt to those with whom I disagree? When have I presumed others' intentions or experiences before even hearing their stories or experiences? When have I valued my political affiliation or party more than my identity as a disciple of Christ who is called to model love and mercy, even in civil discourse?

5. How is Christ calling me to strive to recognize the human dignity of someone with whom I disagree—even passionately?

Close with Prayer

Close with a few moments of prayer and conversation with God about how you might be called to be a bridge builder and sign of unity in your family, parish, school, workplace, or other community (in-person or online). If possible, spend some time bringing these reflections to the Blessed Sacrament, allowing the Lord to speak to your heart in prayer. Also consider receiving the Sacrament of Penance. It is through repentance and reconciliation that our hearts are transformed, healing broken relationships, renewing our communion with others, and loving our neighbors more fully.

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