

In today's Gospel our Lord Jesus basically summarizes our Catholic faith, which is centered on Love: *in response* to God's unconditional and saving love for us, we are called as His adopted children to love Him *in return* with our whole heart and mind *and* to love our neighbor as ourselves. In other words, love is the essence of human existence: we were freely created *out of* love, *to be loved*, and *to love*. We were created and redeemed *by love* and therefore we are called to love God and others *in return*!

To love God means to faithfully keep His commandments and humbly do His will in all things, thereby sharing in His divine nature. To love our neighbor means to freely seek the authentic good of others *purely* for their sake. As Catholics and disciples of Christ, we are called to love God and neighbor *at all times and in every circumstance, regardless of where we are and what we're doing*. And this most especially includes the voting booth.

Now I don't know if you know this, but there's a Presidential election coming up. And brothers and sisters, I don't know about you, but I can't wait to see more TV ads for dog food and diapers again.

Now before we vote our conscience on election day, we have a serious, moral obligation as disciples to properly *form* our conscience according to fundamental teachings of Christ and His Church.

Our Lord Jesus just instructed us in today's Gospel that we should love the Lord, our God, with *all our heart and with all our mind*. To love God with *all our heart and mind* means to *humbly* form our conscience according to *His* will and our moral conscience is a function of the mind that encourages us to do good and avoid evil. Our conscience is *not* our personal opinions or our feelings, but rather it's judgment of reason by which we recognize the moral quality of a concrete act. And so discipleship is based on properly forming our conscience and freely, humbly, and lovingly conforming *our hearts and minds to* Christ and His Church, *not* the other way around!

Therefore, as a priest of our Lord Jesus Christ, I have a sacred duty to help form your conscience so that you can love God *and* your neighbor in every aspect of your life, *including* the voting booth. When we priests die, we'll have to answer to God for how well we shepherded the flock entrusted to our pastoral care. So everything I'm saying and

about to say is out of *nothing but sincere love for you* and a burning priestly desire for your holiness and salvation.

Before I go further, let me be absolutely clear: by virtue of Canon Law (Canon 287) and the Magisterium's clear teaching, the Church in her clerical hierarchy is officially and rightfully *non-partisan* in that we do not and *should not* endorse political candidates or political parties. Brothers and sisters, in all honesty, the Church is already burdened with sinful, fallible, and imperfect clergy and hierarchical leadership, the *last thing we need* is to endorse and align ourselves with sinful, fallible, and imperfect politicians and political parties, who are *not our salvation!* *These people are not our saviors or messiahs*—they cannot save us from sin and death. Ultimately, the Church endorses *principles, not* politicians or parties – and these enduring moral principles are contained in Divine Revelation, the Magisterial teachings of Christ's Church, and the natural moral law.

Thankfully, Christ's Church, especially in Her Magisterium, *transcends partisan politics*. And for the lay faithful who can be active in partisan politics, it's important to know that *discipleship must always*

come before partisanship! So I want to say *clearly without ambiguity*: *nothing* I'm about to say *should in any way* be interpreted as an endorsement of any political candidate or party.

Furthermore, everything I'm about to say is drawn from the principal teaching document of the American Catholic Bishops, entitled *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*. This comprehensive and authoritative document, rooted in the Magisterial teaching of the Church, can be easily found on the USCCB's website or by a simple Google search. For your convenience, this document will be posted on my section of the parish website – just click on my name on the left-hand side to find a link for it. I highly recommend that every Catholic read this entire document from beginning to end as it really constitutes the gold standard of conscience formation for Catholics as it pertains to voting and faithful citizenship.

Let me begin by stating that Catholics are *not single-issue voters*. Indeed we affirm that *all of the issues* before us are important—very important. Yet while *all* of the issues *are important*, *some* issues, given their nature and circumstances, are *more* important and foundational

than others. Not all public policy issues are the *same* nor do they carry the *same* moral weight and gravity.

Moreover, as long as we embrace the basic principles of the Church's social doctrine, Catholics of good will can respectfully disagree on the level of prudential judgment regarding solutions to certain issues. For example, we absolutely *must* help the poor, but Catholics of good will can respectfully disagree on *how best* to alleviate poverty. Catholics of good will can respectfully disagree on *how best* to strengthen the economy, preserve our national security, ensure access to affordable, quality healthcare for all, improve education, and reform our immigration system, etc. These are examples of important issues where Catholics of good will can honestly and respectfully disagree in terms of solutions and specific approaches.

Then there are other issues that are absolutely *non-negotiable* in terms of what positions we as Catholics can hold given the moral gravity, unique foundational nature, and circumstances of these issues. Such non-negotiable issues involve what are called "intrinsic evils," which are actions that can *never* be morally justified under *any*

circumstances. Some examples of intrinsic evils are murder, rape, theft, sexual abuse, physician-assisted suicide, torture, racism, pornography, government efforts to destroy religious freedom and conscience rights, and the redefinition of marriage.

It's the teaching of the Church, articulated by the U.S. Bishops in their document on Faithful Citizenship, that Catholics clearly *cannot* support intrinsic evils *nor* can we vote for politicians who support intrinsic evils *if our intention* is to endorse the intrinsic evil. If we *knowingly* and *deliberately* vote for politicians who support intrinsic evils *with our own intention of supporting such intrinsic evils*, then we're *formally* complicit in such evils, because *by our vote*, we enable and empower such politicians to enact policies that would lead to, perpetuate, and promote such grave evils. Such formal cooperation with an intrinsic evil through voting would constitute a grave mortal sin against God and our neighbor.

Furthermore, October has been declared by the American Bishops, to be "Respect Life Month" when we as disciples of Christ reaffirm our solemn commitment to protect *every* human life from conception until

natural death, *especially* the weakest and most vulnerable among us, such as the pre-born, the poor, the disabled, the elderly, the terminally ill, the migrant, and the refugee. As Catholics we proudly affirm that *every* human person possesses equal and intrinsic dignity, value, and worth: born and pre-born, black and white, male and female, heterosexual and homosexual, young and old, disabled, etc.

During Respect Life Month, we reaffirm that the right to life is the *most basic and fundamental* human right upon which all other rights and privileges absolutely depend. *Brothers and sisters, which human right is greater than the right to life? The right to actually live and exist?*

Now before I continue, I would like to say to anyone who's either had or experienced an abortion that our Lord Jesus *loves you with an infinite and perfect love* and He reaches out to you with His mercy and compassion. Through wonderful resources and organizations like Project Rachel, Rachel's Vineyard, and the global Silent No More Awareness Campaign, there is help, hope, and healing for post-abortive women and men. *Please know that you are loved and that you are not*

alone – there is forgiveness and healing, especially through the powerful Sacrament of Reconciliation! And since all of us here are sinners, we must know that there is *no sin too great* for God’s infinite mercy and love, which overcomes all evil! There is no wound too great for God’s healing grace!

That being said, let us return to the paramount human right, the right to life. Currently, there are intrinsic evils that gravely violate the most basic and foundational right to life, and they involve the deliberate destruction of innocent human life. Such intrinsic evils include euthanasia, research involving the destruction of human embryos, and the deliberate and systematic killing of innocent pre-born children through abortion-on-demand. These intrinsic evils are in addition to the others that I previously identified. In 1998, the U.S. Bishops stated clearly in their document entitled, *Living the Gospel of Life: A Challenge to American Catholics*, “No public official, especially one claiming to be a faithful and serious Catholic, can responsibly advocate for or actively support direct attacks on innocent human life” (31).

Thus, we as Catholics *cannot* support these intrinsic evils, nor can we vote for politicians who support such intrinsic evils *if our intention is to endorse the intrinsic evil itself*. Such intrinsic evils threatening human life and dignity constitute the most *important and foundational* moral issues for us when voting because of their gravity, nature, and circumstances.

So as we evaluate political candidates on *all* of the issues, we should *first* look to see where they stand on foundational moral issues and see if they support any intrinsic evils. I mean, would we ever vote for a candidate who supported rape or racial segregation? Hopefully not, so why would we vote for candidates who support the legalized and brutal killing of innocent human beings?

Brothers and sisters, as the U.S. Bishops have stated, the pre-eminent moral and human rights issue of our time is abortion-on-demand simply because of its *legality, gravity, nature, magnitude*, and circumstances. Since the Supreme Court unjustly legalized abortion-on-demand throughout all 9 months of pregnancy in its 1973 Roe v. Wade decision, an estimated *62 million* innocent pre-born babies have been

killed and countless women and men have been seriously harmed physically and psychologically. **62 million and counting**—what a staggering and horrific number. And that’s just in the U.S. It doesn’t include the estimated total of global abortions.

Brothers and sisters, the pre-born are undoubtedly, the most innocent, the weakest, and the most defenseless among us and they’re being **legally slaughtered** on a daily basis in our country under the truly disturbing guise of “choice.” Humane societies should not equate “freedom of choice” with killing innocent human beings, **period**. And just to be clear, abortion is **not** a religious or philosophical issue! Rather, at its core, abortion is a moral and human rights issue centered on equality that demands the attention of all citizens with a functioning moral conscience. You don’t have to be Catholic or even religious to oppose the brutal and deliberate killing of an innocent pre-born baby.

Brothers and sisters, the pre-born are the poorest of the poor and the most vulnerable among us -- and so social justice, peace, and equality **must begin** in the womb! Our beloved country, which was founded on the unalienable right to life, is **better** than abortion. **Women**

deserve better than abortion! I've seen first-hand as a priest the immense pain and suffering that abortion inflicts on women and men.

Now what does the Church advise us to do when *all* of the candidates running for office are objectively bad and support intrinsic evils? This is certainly a dilemma for us as Catholic voters, but the Church provides us with two options: First, we could abstain from voting in a particular race if *all the candidates* support intrinsic evils. Or, for *truly grave moral reasons*, we could vote for the candidate who would *objectively* do the least amount of harm to the common good and the dignity of the human person. This a difficult decision that should be made based on the *facts* of a candidate's positions, record, and policy proposals as well as the fundamental moral teachings of Christ's Church.

Brothers and sisters, I'd be more than happy to discuss all of this with anyone who wants to discuss this further. As we prepare to worship and receive our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is Life and Love Itself, let us ask Him for the grace to humbly form our consciences well according to the teachings of His Church so that we can love Him and

our neighbor with every fiber of our being and remain faithful to Him in every aspect of our life.