

## PASTOR'S COLUMN

November 1/2/2008

“...a nation that is just {is} one that keeps faith.

...A nation of firm purpose You keep in peace for its trust in You.

...The way of the just is smooth; the path of the just You make level.”

(Isaiah: chapter 26)

The Catholic Church has an obligation to participate in (indeed, lead in) shaping the moral character of society. It is a part of the mission given to us by Jesus Christ.

Our Faith helps us see more clearly and fully the truth about human life and dignity which we have already ascertained through human reason. So strong is the truth the Church has uncovered, that men and women throughout the world look to her for the constant and steady teaching of Jesus Christ in a continually relativistic world.

So powerful is that teaching that even those who seek to set themselves up against the Church must constantly use the truth of the Faith as a starting point for their “arguments” – there is no reasonable way to avoid the fundamental power of the Word of God which subsists in the Roman Catholic Church and its traditions.

In the Catholic Tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue to be practiced; and participation in the political life of a country is a moral obligation. But, we must be cautioned that our participation is not to be based on raw human emotion and feelings.

As Catholics, we need to be guided more by our moral convictions than by our attachment to a particular political party or interest group. And those moral convictions must be based on properly and well formed consciences; consciences formed in accordance with the truth of Jesus Christ as taught by the Church.

We Catholics have a lifelong obligation to form our consciences in accord with human reason, which has been enlightened by the teaching of Jesus Christ as it comes to us in the formal teaching of the Church. We are never finished with the formation of our consciences.

We are not free, for example, to vote for a political candidate simply because we like him or her, or because the candidate appeals to our own selfish interests. We must consider the greater good of our nation as a whole, and the dreams and aspirations of all our citizenry, especially those with little or no economic or political influence.

All too often in our own lives, there is a chasm between what we say we believe (based on what we pray) and how we live out our convictions. And that influences the way we vote. Our responsibility both as a conscientious citizen and a faithful Catholic is to consider our vote thoughtfully, discerning the promises we make to a faith-filled life, and the real commitment to work through those promises in our day-to-day living.

We cannot separate our life of faith and prayer from the political life we lead as a citizen. We must develop strong, well formed consciences in order to make difficult political decisions because as great and wonderful as our country is, we have morally defective laws. These laws must be corrected in order to restore justice to our relationships with each other which exist through the law.

Pope John Paul II said we must work to best determine how to restore justice and correct morally flawed laws even if that restoration and correction happen gradually and/or partially.

Voting on election day, even if there are only morally flawed candidates available from which to choose, is an obligation for all faithful citizens. To walk away from the election because our favorite candidate isn't nominated, or because we think everyone running is imperfect, is an act which will serve to delay the gradual, slow, partial, but sorely needed correction that our laws and our country need.

The virtue of prudence will shape and inform our ability to faithfully deliberate over available alternatives. Prudence, accompanied by courage will give us the strength to act. As John Paul II used to remind us: "Do not be afraid."

- Do not be afraid to form your conscience based on human reason and the Catholic Faith.
- Do not be afraid to defend your beliefs once developed; speak up.
- Do not be afraid to let people know you are Catholic, and that you intend to engage politically as a Catholic.
- Do not be afraid to vote, even if every single candidate seems less than perfect to you; people died so that your right to vote would be forever preserved, and no one is perfect!

Listen to St. Paul:

“...conduct yourselves in a way worthy of the Gospel of Christ, so that...I may hear news of you, that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind, struggling together for the faith of the Gospel, not intimidated in any way by your opponents.”  
(Philippians 1:27-28)

God bless you,

Father Richard