

My Brothers and Sisters,

In just a little over a week, we will go to the polls to vote. Today, therefore, I would like to highlight a few important Catholic principles.

The Prophet Jeremiah prophesied before and during the Babylonian Exile. Prior to the Exile, the nation of Israel had split into two kingdoms. Because the Israelites failed to keep their covenant with God, God permitted both nations to fall to their enemies and the people to be sent into Exile. If there is a practical lesson for us in this, it is that our choices, individually and as a nation, have consequences not just for us as individuals but also for the nation.

For Catholics and Christians, voting is both a right and a moral obligation. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us, "It is necessary that all participate ... in promoting the common good. ... As far as possible citizens should take an active part in public life" [nos. 1913-1915]. The Church does not have the right to tell you for whom to vote or what party to support. However, it is the obligation of the Church to help you form your conscience so that your vote reflects authentic human, Christian values.

Second, faithful citizenship requires us to become values voters. It requires us to look beyond simply our own self-interest toward the common good. Our self-interest is a valid consideration, but it cannot be the only consideration. When voters are interviewed, it is often clear that they have voted their pocket book, in other words, only in their own self-interest. According to the American bishops, "a moral test for society is how we treat the weakest among us—the unborn, those dealing with disabilities or terminal illness, the poor and marginalized."¹

Third, Catholics should not be single issue voters. On the other hand, the bishops of the United States remind us, "A candidate's position on a single issue is not sufficient to guarantee a voter's support. Yet a candidate's position on a single issue that involves an intrinsic evil...may legitimately lead a voter to disqualify a candidate from receiving support."² In other words, although we are not to be single issue voters, voters **may** choose not to support a candidate on the basis of a single issue that involves intrinsic evil.

Fourth, many citizens, including many Catholics, argue that the Catholic Church has been overly focused on abortion almost to the exclusion of other critical moral issues in our country. However, the Church's position is based on the belief that there is a hierarchy of values and that the right to life is the basis for all other rights. In *Christifideles Laici*, Blessed Pope John Paul II wrote, "The common outcry, which is justly made on behalf of human rights..., is false and illusory if *the right to life*, the most basic and fundamental right and the condition of all other personal rights, is not defended with maximum determination" [38].

For the sake of perspective, Cardinal Daniel DiNardo put it more graphically:

¹United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "The Challenge of Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship," (Washington, DC: USCCB Communications, 2007, Publication No. 7-236), p. 2.

²Ibid., p. 1.

The nationwide death toll from abortions since 1973 is staggering—equal to the entire combined populations of California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Utah and Nevada. Put another way, it is as if every man, woman and child now living in the Gulf Coast states from Texas to Florida, or every person living in the Atlantic Coast states from Maine through Virginia, had perished from the earth.

Cardinal DiNardo continued:

And yet the number of deaths alone cannot begin to convey the full impact of the loss to families and to our nation of each unique, unrepeatable human being, who was created with the capacity to love, to learn, to share and contribute to their families and to our country.³

At the same time, the Church also wants us to consider seriously the positions of candidates on issues involving “food and shelter, education and employment, health care and housing” especially for the poor and most vulnerable among us.⁴

Fifth, another critical issue to be considered when evaluating candidates this year is their position on religious freedom or freedom of religion. It is no secret that freedom of religion is under assault in all parts of the world. In many countries, people are persecuted or killed on the basis of their religious beliefs and practices. In our country, many want to limit freedom of religion to freedom of worship. Sometimes this means limiting or excluding the influence of religion on public life. Other times this means requiring individuals or institutions to act against their faith or conscience.

My brothers and sisters, there is a pamphlet on voting in your bulletins. I really want to encourage you to study the candidates’ positions on various issues, then to pray over them, and finally to vote for the candidates whose beliefs and positions you believe will most advance the common good, i.e., the candidates whose positions you believe will best embody authentic human values.

³Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, “2012 Respect Life Month Statement,” <http://www.usccb.org/about/pro-life-activities/respect-life-program/2012/2012-respect-life-sunday-statement.cfm>.

⁴United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, op. cit., p. 2.