

Reflection for October 11 from Father Tim

We are less than a month away from the election in the United States. I don't know about all of you, but I cannot wait for it to be behind us. The seemingly-constant negative advertisements about candidates; the continual political advertisements sent to us by mail, and the general tensions of the political environment seems to have people on edge. And of course, the COVID-19 presence does not help matters either. We know that voting has now begun in many states in the country, and absentee ballots are being sent out in the coming days; so we as Catholics have the fundamental right and the duty to participate in the political process. Because if we do not vote, we should not complain about the outcome of the particular elections.

So how do we as Catholics decide to vote? How do we decide who are the best candidates to lead our country and our state, and which of the candidates will best bring the Gospel message of Jesus Christ (and the teachings of the Church) to their particular offices? Maybe we are not thrilled with any of the candidates running for particular offices; that we would much rather have different choices. But we must decide for those who *are* running for the particular offices; not for those that we *wish* were running for particular offices.

There are many different issues that we must ponder in this election; the economy, the environment, healthcare, public education, immigration, religious liberty, foreign policy and national defense, the right to life, proper housing, racial equality, law enforcement, and the 'new kid on the block' – COVID-19. These are all important issues, because we are trying to vote in a way that builds up the common good and that is best for society. But how do we as Catholics discern these issues and what is most important in doing what is right and just in the voting process?

In his Apostolic Exhortation entitled *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis states: "The mission of proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ has a universal destination. It's mandate of charity encompasses all dimensions of existence, all individuals, all areas of community life, and all peoples." (181) In the 2020 document *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship – Part I – The U.S. Bishop's Reflection on Catholic Teaching and Political Life*, the Bishops state: "The intention of this document from the Bishop's conference is to help Catholics form a proper conscience in accordance with God's truth. We (the Bishops) recognize that the responsibility to make choices in political life rests with each individual in light of a properly formed conscience, as that participation goes well beyond casting a vote in a particular election." (Forming, par. 7)

It states in *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* that the foremost teachings of Catholic doctrine and the proper forming of conscience are the dignity of the human person, the common
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good, subsidiarity and solidarity (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, no. 160.) Within this framework, Catholics are better able to evaluate policy positions, party platforms, and actions in light of the Gospel and the moral and social teachings of the Church to help build a better world.

The document *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* continues: “Part of that rich heritage on faithful citizenship is the teaching of the Vatican Council II’s Declaration on Religious Liberty (*Dignitatis Humane*). It says that “society itself may profit by the moral qualities of justice and peace which have their origin in (people’s) faithfulness to God and to His holy will” (no. 6) (*Forming*, par. 4)

“There are some things we must never do, as individuals or as a society, because they are always incompatible with love of God and neighbor. Such actions are so deeply flawed that they are always opposed to the authentic good of persons. These are called “intrinsically evil” actions. They must always be rejected and opposed and must never be supported or condoned. A prime example is the intentional taking of innocent human life, as in abortion and euthanasia...It is a mistake with grave moral consequences to treat the destruction of innocent human life merely as a matter of individual choice. A legal system that violates the basic right to life on the grounds of choice is fundamentally flawed.” (*Forming*, par. 21) “We are a nation founded on “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness,” but the right to life itself is not fully protected, especially for unborn children, the terminally ill, and the elderly, the most vulnerable members of the American family.” (*Forming*, par. 2) Also, the use or support of contraception and/or abortifacients, (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2370); and the destruction and/or research of human embryos, (*Forming*, par. 24) must always be rejected by the faithful and the sanctity of marriage between one man and one woman, (*CCC*, 2357) must always be defended and upheld by the faithful. “We are a society built on the strength of families, called to defend marriage and offer moral and economic supports for family life.” (*Forming*, par. 2).

These are challenging days for all of us. The upcoming election simply adds to the mix. May we take time to pray and to reflect; to research the candidates positions on all the issues – to go to their websites and to look at Voters guides; to see how best they align with Catholic Social Teaching and the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to allow the Holy Spirit to guide us as we vote for the future leaders of our country.

May God bless all of you, and may God bless the United States of America! Fr. Tim.