



*We always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and powerfully bring to fulfillment every good purpose and every effort of faith, that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, in accord with the grace of our God and Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Thes:11,12*

My Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

While St. Paul writes to the Thessalonians to speak of his prayer for them, I also pray like St. Paul for you. These are difficult times. Soon we will have our presidential election. Many of you have written to me about the election and your questions regarding the consequences of your vote for either candidate. Some of you have stated that you won't vote at all, because of your uncertainty about which candidate to choose.

Voting in our country is a privilege and one in which I encourage your participation to the fullest. This means taking care to know all the candidates, including those running for your city or county council, your judges, your state legislators, and other local candidates, as well as your presidential choices.

The opportunity to vote in our country is a gift to us. It is by these choices that we can offer our world the opportunity to be guided by the tenets of faith, as best as possible. We recognize that the candidates may not be people of faith, and because of that, they may not live according to our faith, or if they exhibit an essence of faith, it might be humanistic in its approach. It is our responsibility not to judge them, but to determine if their platform will allow us to practice our faith and to bring about God's love of us and His command for us to love our neighbor as ourselves to thrive. The fact that much of our political rhetoric has become very negative and that political polarization seems to have grown should not dissuade us from the high calling to work for a world that allows everyone to thrive, a world in which all persons, all families, have what they need to fulfill their God-given destiny.

Some of you have asked if you can partake in the Eucharist if you vote a certain way. It is not a sin to vote; it is a responsibility. As a Catholic, this responsibility requires that you follow the guidelines of Faithful Citizenship and vote with sincerity of heart, no matter the candidate. Perhaps the question is more about the Catholic you are or not; whether you are truly active in your faith and pray, study, and participate in the Sacraments all the days of your life. It is not fulfilling your responsibility to vote that would keep you away from partaking in the Eucharist. Catholics cannot ignore their inescapable moral challenges or simply dismiss the Church's guidance or policy directions.

For example, *Living the Gospel of Life* declares, "Abortion and euthanasia have become preeminent threats to human life and dignity because they directly attack life itself, the most fundamental good and the condition for all others" (no. 5). Abortion, the deliberate killing of a human being before birth, is never morally acceptable and must always be opposed. Cloning and destruction of human embryos for research or even for potential cures are always wrong. The purposeful taking of human life by assisted suicide and euthanasia is not an act of mercy, but an unjustifiable assault on human life. Genocide, torture, and the direct and intentional targeting of noncombatants in war or terrorist attacks are always wrong. Laws which legitimize any of these practices are profoundly unjust and immoral. As Catholics, we support laws and policies to protect human life to the maximum degree possible.

Catholics must also work to avoid war and to promote peace. This is of particular importance, as there is a danger in the present time of becoming indifferent to war because of the number of armed conflicts. War is never a reflection of what ought to be but a sign that something more true to human dignity has failed. The Catholic tradition recognizes the legitimacy of just war teaching when defending the innocent in the face of grave evil, but we must never lose sight of the cost of war and its harm to human life.

None of the platforms of our presidential candidates perfectly reflect our Catholic beliefs. That is why the responsibility of each voter is so great and so important. Pope Francis recently reminded us of our responsibility, "study the proposals well, pray and choose with your conscience."

When you go to the polls to vote, think about the faith which guides you from conception through natural death, the party of our one triune God. May our God make us worthy of His calling and powerfully bring to fulfillment every good purpose and every effort of faith.

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