

30th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Election day comes in just two and a half weeks, and voters will pass judgment. The media's attention focuses on the presidency, but other offices need to be filled, and issues need to be resolved. All people of good will try to make good choices, but some choices are especially difficult. People may not understand all the issues. They may not know all the candidates, and they may not like the candidates they know.

Every four years the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops publishes a booklet called "Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship." It addresses such questions as why the Church teaches about public policy and what the Church says about Catholic social teaching in the public square. Since the last edition of the booklet, these are the developments in the United States that the current edition tries to address:

"The ongoing destruction of over one million innocent human lives each year by abortion; physician-assisted suicide; the redefinition of marriage—the vital cell of society—by the courts, political bodies, and increasingly by American culture itself; the excessive consumption of material goods and the destruction of natural resources, which harm both the environment and the poor; the deadly attacks on fellow Christians and religious minorities throughout the world; the narrowing redefinition of religious freedom, which threatens both individual conscience and the freedom of the Church to serve; economic policies that fail to prioritize the poor, at home or abroad; a broken immigration system and a worldwide refugee crisis; wars, terror, and violence that threaten every aspect of human life and dignity."

Many Catholics would simply like someone to tell them how to vote for each candidate and issue, but the bishops want us to form our consciences. For example, these paragraphs seem particularly fit this year: "A Catholic cannot vote for a candidate who favors a policy promoting an intrinsically evil act, such as abortion, euthanasia, assisted suicide, deliberately subjecting workers or the poor to subhuman living conditions, redefining marriage in ways that violate its essential meaning, or racist behavior, if the voter's intent is to support that position. In such cases, a Catholic would be guilty of formal cooperation in grave evil. At the same time, a voter should not use a candidate's opposition to an intrinsic evil to justify indifference or inattentiveness to other important moral issues involving human life and dignity." The booklet goes on: "There may be times when a Catholic who rejects a candidate's unacceptable position even on policies promoting an intrinsically evil act may reasonably decide to vote for that candidate for other morally grave reasons." The voter may even decide not to vote at all or "to vote for the candidate deemed less likely to advance such a morally flawed position and more likely to pursue other authentic human goods."

As St. Paul reached the end of his second letter to Timothy, he knew that he was dying, and he looked back on his life with these feelings: "I have competed well; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith." Throughout our lives we are all called to make judgments. At the end of our lives God will judge us on how we fought the good fight. Did we form our consciences and follow them at home, at school, at work, and in the voting booth?