

My Grandpa Bertrand was born 125 years ago this past Friday. By the time he was 4 years old, both his parents had died. He died at the age of 72 after a fall from a ladder 2 weeks before my third birthday; my other grandfather had died before I was born. Each November 2nd Catholics celebrate a day that is formally called the Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed, but we know it as All Souls Day, or in some cultures the Day of the Dead. On this day we pray for the faithful members of our Church family who have died, some of whom we never got to know. We believe that we will be joined to them again someday and enjoy their company because of Christ. Saint Paul says that Christ has the power “to bring all things into subjection to himself,” and because of this “he will change our lowly body to conform with his glorified Body.” Paul makes a striking point; he says, “Our citizenship is in heaven.” If there’s one “country” that all Christians belong to, it is heaven. It is the place where Jesus dwells, and the place from which he will come to save us – the living and the dead.

While we await that day, we practice our citizenship in our nation and in our church. Through the Bishop’s Annual Appeal the members of all our parishes support the work of the diocese, such as Catholic Charities, Respect Life, education for children and youth, and outreaches to the poor, disabled, and needy. To be a good citizen of heaven, we should be good citizens of our diocese. Next weekend we’ll have envelopes available for you. Please make a gift to show your support.

On election day I urge you to practice your citizenship faithfully. Our bishops have said, “Human life is sacred. . . . In our society, human life is especially under direct attack from abortion. Other direct threats to the sanctity of human life include euthanasia, human cloning, and the destruction of human embryos for research.” The sacredness of human life calls us “to oppose torture, unjust war, and the use of the death penalty; to prevent genocide and attacks against noncombatants; to oppose racism; and to overcome poverty and suffering.” We believe that the family, “based on marriage between a man and a woman – is the first and fundamental unit of society.” We believe in the defense of human rights including “food and shelter, education and employment, health care and housing, freedom of religion and family life.” We believe that “those who are weak, vulnerable, and most in need deserve preferential concern,” that “the economy must serve people, not the other way around,” that workers have rights and responsibilities, that we have a global duty to love our neighbor and “to welcome the stranger among us – including immigrants seeking work, a safe home, education for their children, and a decent life for their families.” We also need to show respect for God’s creation. All these points come from our bishops. When citizens of heaven vote, we vote our conscience. It’s hard, but I urge you to reflect on our values, apply them to the issues, and vote.

The Church we belong to is not just the visible Church on earth. It includes the saints in heaven. When we die, we hope that even people who never knew us can call us not just the departed, but the faithful departed. They will if we are good citizens – citizens of heaven.