

Missouri's Governor Holden has battled congress recently over the annual budget and citizens carrying concealable firearms. The Catholic Church does not ever endorse one candidate or one political party. But we do endorse issues like investing in a quality education for all and providing for the common good. For example, our church prefers widespread diplomacy over widespread firearms.

On issues like these, politicians, clergy and civic leaders get strongly impassioned. You may accuse them of grandstanding, of insincerity, of wanting to improve their stature or to garner more votes. But normally politicians make statements they believe in, and it's a wondrous thing to see.

A lot us do not stick up for what we believe. We are swayed by an argument that intimidates or an ad that looks pretty. We think we know what our beliefs are, but in circumstances that challenge them, we melt away.

Today's first reading is the call of the prophet Ezekiel, one of the four major prophets of the Old Testament. When the King of Babylon captured Jerusalem in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, Ezekiel was taken into exile. A few years later God called him, and he prophesied a message of warning and hope for the next twenty years.

God's said to Ezekiel, "I am sending you to the Israelites, rebels who have rebelled against me." That's a strange description. The Israelites were the chosen people, but they broke the covenant and ended up in exile. God was sending Ezekiel to people indifferent about religion and angry about exile. God also said to Ezekiel, "Hard of face and obstinate of heart are they to whom I am sending you." So, how would you like that job? God says, "I'll tell you what to say, but the people who hear it won't like it." This is what the prophets of the Old Testament did. The word of God so filled them, they had to speak, even when people didn't want to listen.

At their best, our political and civic leaders do that for us. Like prophets, they speak oracles of what they believe to be true. We may disagree with them, but the issues deserve a hearing. This weekend as we celebrate our freedom as a country, we are grateful for the democratic process and for freedom of speech. We can show that gratitude by remaining informed on issues and listening for today's prophets who speak the voice of God.