

“I prayed, and prudence was given me; I pleaded, and the spirit of wisdom came to me.” (Wisdom 7:7) These are the first words from our readings today. This is a plea to God that is so incredibly important as we go forth in the next few weeks to exercise our God given right to self determination and our sacred duty to vote in the upcoming elections.

Pope Francis and Pope Benedict XVI have both said; “If indeed the just ordering of society and of the state is a central responsibility of politics, the Church cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice.” In the coming elections, as in all elections we face political challenges that demand well informed moral choices.

A couple of quick points before I continue; if what I have said so far sounds familiar, congratulations! You have read and remembered the handouts on Faithful Citizenship from the US Conference of Catholic Bishops that have been and will continue to be in the Bulletin, a different one each week for the month of October. I have shamelessly and happily quoted our Bishops throughout the great majority this sermon.

The second point, in the Catholic Church we focus on the issues as they apply to faith, morals and social justice. Although we may disagree on the means, through civil discourse, and by working toward consensus, practical solutions can be discovered and implemented.

The decision on whom or what we vote for is rooted in a well-formed conscience. The conscience is the voice of God resounding in the human heart, revealing the truth to us and calling us to do what is good while shunning evil. Conscience is a judgment of reason whereby the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act.

The Church also encourages us to develop the virtue of prudence, which enables us “to discern our true good in every circumstance and to choose the right means of achieving it” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1806). Prudence shapes and informs our ability to deliberate over available alternatives, to determine what is most fitting to a specific context, and to act. Prudence must be accompanied by courage, which calls us to act. As Catholics seek to advance the common good, we must carefully discern which public policies are morally sound. At times, we may choose different ways to respond to social problems, but we cannot differ on our obligation

to protect human life and dignity and help build, through moral means, a more just and peaceful world.

The Church's obligation to participate in shaping the moral character of society is a requirement of our faith, a part of the mission given to us by Jesus Christ. As people of both faith and reason, we are called to bring truth to political life and to practice Christ's commandment to "love one another" (Jn 13:34). This community, our Church brings to political dialogue a consistent moral framework and broad experience serving those in need. Faithful citizenship is an ongoing responsibility, not just an election year duty as demonstrated by the continuing issues we face with sex education for our children.

We voters should use the teaching of the Church to examine candidates' positions on issues and should consider candidates' integrity, philosophy, and performance. It is important for all of us "to see beyond party politics, to analyze campaign rhetoric critically, and to choose our political leaders according to principle, not party affiliation or mere self-interest" (USCCB, Living the Gospel of Life, no. 33). We should look at the Candidate's position on the issues using the four of the principles of Catholic Social Teaching, the dignity of the person as a child of God, subsidiarity, the common good and solidarity.

First, foremost, primary, of utmost importance, overriding other issues --(I hope your get the point) --is the dignity and intrinsic value of the human person from conception to natural death. In order to foster the dignity of the individual, the family, based on marriage between a man and a woman, is the fundamental unit of society. This sanctuary for the creation and nurturing of children must not be redefined, undermined, or neglected.

The next issue to consider is subsidiarity; in a nutshell, this means that issues should be addressed at the lowest level possible. In other words, a federal program should never be put in place when a city or county program is adequate to meet the requirement. The principle of subsidiarity reminds us that larger institutions in society should not overwhelm or interfere with smaller or local institutions; yet larger institutions have essential responsibilities when the more local institutions cannot adequately protect human dignity, meet human needs, and advance the common good.

The common good is comprised of "the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their potential

more fully and more easily.” Human dignity is respected and the common good is fostered only if human rights are protected and basic responsibilities are met. Every human being has a right to life, a right to religious freedom, and a right to have access to those things required for human decency—food and shelter, education and employment, health care and housing.

Solidarity is “a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to . . . the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all.” It is found in “a commitment to the good of one’s neighbor with the readiness, in the Gospel sense, to ‘lose oneself’ for the sake of the other instead of exploiting them, and to ‘serve them’ instead of oppressing them for one’s own advantage

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. These intrinsically evil acts must always be rejected and never supported. A preeminent example is the intentional taking of innocent human life, as in abortion. Similarly, human cloning, destructive research on human embryos, and other acts that directly violate the sanctity and dignity of human life including genocide, torture, and the targeting of noncombatants in acts of terror or war, can never be justified. Nor can violations of human dignity, such as acts of racism, treating workers as mere means to an end, deliberately subjecting workers to subhuman living conditions, treating the poor as disposable, or redefining marriage to deny its essential meaning, ever be justified.

Two temptations in public life can distort the Church’s defense of human life and dignity: The first is a moral equivalence that makes no ethical distinctions between different kinds of issues involving human life and dignity. The direct and intentional destruction of innocent human life from the moment of conception until natural death is always wrong and is not just one issue among many. It must always be opposed.

The second is the misuse of these necessary moral distinctions as a way of dismissing or ignoring other serious threats to human life and dignity. Racism and other unjust discrimination, the use of the death penalty, resorting to unjust war, environmental degradation, the use of torture, war crimes, the failure to respond to those who are suffering from hunger or a lack of health care or housing, pornography, human trafficking, redefining civil marriage, compromising religious liberty, or unjust immigration policies

are all serious moral issues that challenge our consciences and require us to act.

As Clergy we cannot and do not tell you how to vote; the responsibility to make political choices rests with each person and his or her properly formed conscience, aided by prudence. This exercise of conscience begins with always opposing policies that violate human life or weaken its protection.

As Catholics we are not single-issue voters. A candidate's position on a single issue is not sufficient to guarantee a voter's support. Yet a candidate's position on a single issue that involves an intrinsic evil, such as support for legal abortion or the promotion of racism, may legitimately lead a voter to disqualify a candidate from receiving support.

According to our Bishops, what public policies should concern us the most? The Bishops have listed 9 issues, in the interest of time; I will highlight 4 of them.

Address the preeminent requirement to protect human life—by restricting and bringing to an end the destruction of unborn children through abortion and providing women in crisis pregnancies with the supports they need. End the following practices: the use of euthanasia and assisted suicide to deal with the burdens of illness and disability; the destruction of human embryos in the name of research; the use of the death penalty to combat crime; and the imprudent resort to war to address international disputes.

Protect the fundamental understanding of Marriage as the life-long and faithful union of one man and one woman as the central institution of society; promote the complementarity of the sexes and reject false “gender” ideologies; provide better support for family life morally, socially, and economically, so that our nation helps parents raise their children with respect for life, sound moral values, and an ethic of stewardship and responsibility.

Achieve comprehensive Immigration reform that offers a path to citizenship, treats immigrant workers fairly, prevents the separation of families, maintains the integrity of our borders, respects the rule of law, and addresses the factors that compel people to leave their own countries.

Ensure full conscience protection and religious freedom for individuals and groups to meet social needs, and so enable families, community groups,

economic structures, and government to work together to overcome poverty, pursue the common good, and care for creation.

Now, if you want to go back and read in more detail the documents from the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, this sermon is based on, they will be posted on the Good Shepherd web site and links to the references that I have used are included in the document.

Please read over in full what the Bishops have to say, examine the position of the candidates for office in light of their guidance as well as the 6 amendments to the North Carolina Constitution that are on the ballot. Then exercise your citizenship and go out and vote.

## References:

Link to print a sample ballot:

<https://www.ncvoter.org/your-ballot-and-precinct/>

Links to the voting guidance handouts from the US Conference of Catholic Bishops:

Oct. 6/7 - Challenges of Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship - Part 1  
[www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/upload/The-Challenge-of-Forming-Consciences-for-Faithful-Citizenship-Part-1.pdf](http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/upload/The-Challenge-of-Forming-Consciences-for-Faithful-Citizenship-Part-1.pdf)

Oct. 13/14 - Challenges of Forming Consciences For Faithful Citizenship - Part 2  
[www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/upload/The-Challenge-of-Forming-Consciences-for-Faithful-Citizenship-Part-2.pdf](http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/upload/The-Challenge-of-Forming-Consciences-for-Faithful-Citizenship-Part-2.pdf)

Oct. 20/21 - Conscience Formation [www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/parishes-and-schools/upload/Conscience-Formation-bulletin-insert.pdf](http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/parishes-and-schools/upload/Conscience-Formation-bulletin-insert.pdf)

Oct. 27/28 - Civil Dialogue [www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/parishes-and-schools/upload/Civil-Dialogue-bulletin-insert.pdf](http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/parishes-and-schools/upload/Civil-Dialogue-bulletin-insert.pdf)

Link to the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, POLITICAL ACTIVITY AND LOBBYING GUIDELINES FOR CATHOLIC ORGANIZATIONS

<http://www.usccb.org/about/general-counsel/upload/USCCB-PACI-Guide-2016.pdf>