

Prolife, Abortion and this Election

I have always been taught that we respect the dignity of life “from the womb to the tomb.” Such respect emanates from the grace we all received from being created in God’s image and likeness. It is given not earned. Pure gift. The late Cardinal Bernardin’s “seamless garment doctrine” stressed a consistent ethic of life, that all life is sacred from the unborn child to the helpless, dying patient. Each human person, whether she be in the womb, homeless on the street, incarcerated on death row, or lying in a hospital bed suffering without much hope of recovery is sacred, an irrepeatable likeness of the Divine, created as if he was the only one but never at the expense of everyone else. Like a seamless garment, there is a unity to the Church’s teaching on life with the human person front and center, as God intended making us “male and female” to be the source and summit of creation. But it is a creation for Christ. Thus, it falls on us, especially with the tremendous gift of human dignity to be “cocreators,” to appreciate all forms of life and to address all issues that challenge any affront to this dignity.

We have always fought for the unborn as they are helpless, defenseless. Last year there were approximately 750,000 abortions in the United States. Quite a staggering number! We need to continue advocating for the unborn that their life may be brought to realization through birth.

An election year always brings with it the tragedy of abortion. The reality of filling another seat on the Supreme Court heightens the issue as it seems that for many years one’s stance on abortion has been the litmus test regardless of which party occupies the White House. It seems to me that in advocating for the defenseless, abortion for many has been the defining issue of what it means to be prolife. Pope Francis stated unequivocally the importance of protecting the unborn while stating that “equally important” are other prolife issues. I jotted down a few of them: immigration (think DACA, refugees seeking freedom, our own family’s ancestors), gun violence (and subsequent murder count), racism (white privilege), affordable healthcare (the vulnerably infirmed, those who cannot afford insurance and/or prescriptions), capital punishment/death penalty (reinstated in 2020 and more federally killed this year than in the previous 56 years combined), mass incarceration, euthanasia or assisted suicide (still permissible in eight states, including our own, and the District of Columbia), climate change (our vocation to be good stewards), victims of human trafficking (and those we victimize in our addiction to pornography), those addicted to drugs, alcohol, gambling and the like (that minimizes our freedom, affects our loved ones and prevents the addicted from growing into the person God calls one to be), and the poor, destitute, abandoned and underprivileged (who cannot realize what justice demands s/he enjoys). This is not an exhaustive list. Certainly, women not being paid equal pay for equal work is a justice issue which makes it a prolife issue. Add to them all those taken advantage of with unjust and deplorable wages, so that the rich and powerful become more so. Review the list and ask how many of our own parishioners, as well as ourselves, are being negatively and painfully impacted by these.

I never tire of the awesome gift of holding a recent newborn and baptizing him in the waters of life. I love when a baby grasps my finger with her five tiny fingers. Who can deny the existence of God when seeing and holding a newborn? On the flip side, I often questioned why Pope John Paul II came out on his balcony, suffering terribly with Parkinson’s, drooling, somewhat inaudible and impossible to understand until I realized that he was teaching us one last lesson, the dignity of life never ends (not to mention our need to participate in the passion of Christ and being faithful to our cross). The fact that no two people share the same fingerprints or DNA can only point to an infinitely amazing Creator who always wants us to protect and to prosper all life. This is our faith. This is the faith that we take to

address all these prolife issues and who is the best candidate to proffer them along in the way God intended.

This is the most difficult election of our time. When Cardinal Tobin responded to the question of the greatest issue facing the Church today being the “chasm between faith and life,” we are reminded that our faith comes first, is not privatized to an hour at Mass, but must inform all our decisions. Faith is not divorced from but rather informs our politics. Thus, we must form our conscience well particularly on who has the best moral integrity to address these prolife issues. If we find ourselves divided, we are not alone. The Bishops struggled in their November session around these issues. The Faithful Citizenship document has not been updated to include the teachings of Benedict XVI and Francis. The only thing “new” is the introductory letter which contradicts itself when at the last minute they added that abortion was the “preeminent” issue while stating that the other issues enumerated above are “equally important.” Preeminent and equally important cannot be at the same time.

John Carr, director of the Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life at Georgetown University, and previously the chief policy advisor to the Bishops who helped author the document “Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship” wrote that the document is criticized “on the one hand for making opposition to abortion the defining criterion for voting and on the other for minimizing abortion’s moral gravity by including it in a list alongside other election issues. Both can’t be true, and neither is accurate.” Carr notes **the priority must be human life and dignity**. He described himself as “politically homeless” referring to how neither party aligns itself perfectly well to Catholic Social teaching. He states that “integrity and character were a part of the document 46 years ago” and “it has never been more important for Catholic voters.” Our conscience needs to decide which candidate has the four essential criteria for leading outlined by Cathy Kaveny, lawyer and theologian from Boston College: competence, character, collaboration (ability to work with others especially those who disagree with them), and connection (who are the people beholden to the candidates, their network of enablers, supporters and advisors). Often, we vote for a person rather than the issues they espouse. Hence, these four criteria become paramount.

It is my opinion, as someone who struggles with all these issues and how best to protect and prosper them, that we will not solve the problem of abortion through legislation. Rather, we need to “win hearts” which is the essence of Salesian Spirituality. We need to have a gentle, open and faith filled conversation especially with the woman who may find herself in an unexpected and unwanted pregnancy. (Hence, we instituted the *Walking with Moms in Need* program which came from this November meeting.) I think we also need to discuss actions, consequences, and responsibilities especially in our generation that seeks a quick fix to anything uncomfortable, challenging, or difficult.

Perhaps we as Catholics find ourselves “politically homeless” as well. But it is our **sacred duty** to vote with **faith guiding us**. All of us need to ask how our faith is being lived out especially amid these numerous prolife issues. What are we doing to educate ourselves? To ameliorate some of them? To appreciate our own life, those around us, those who have little or no voice, and those yet to be born? How can we form our conscience better, pray for guidance from the Holy Spirit and be civil with our sisters and brothers who may disagree with us?