

BULLETIN – JULY 17

Walking a fine line. We are getting into the heat of the 2016 political campaign. No one yet knows what all will take place at the national conventions of the two major parties; but from what we've been treated to so far, it won't be pretty.

The Church and its pastors and employees have to walk a very fine line when advocating for the Church's position on social and other moral issues. We certainly cannot tell or even suggest to people for whom to vote, in terms of a particular candidate or party. We can openly support ballot issues which are in line with Church moral teaching (e.g., a tax proposal for support of veterans or the elderly), as well as advocate against those issues which are contrary to Church teaching (e.g., abortion, adult stem-cell research, physician-assisted suicide). But our primary role is to assist our people in the formation of consciences.

Several months ago, we took up a survey among parishioners to find out what we might be doing right and what needed work. Several respondents were highly critical of what they perceived to be the pastor's using this column as a vehicle for the positions of one political party. I say "perceived" because it is the intention and the duty of the pastor only to write and teach with the mind of the Church. I claim no responsibility for any political party having a platform either conforming to or in opposition to the teachings of the Catholic Church, although I consider it part of my duty to point out instances when those in government (and elsewhere) are treading on thin moral ice. So, for example, it has long been the position of the U.S. bishops' conference to support the concept of universal health care or affordable health insurance for all our citizens. But what about when that concept is cavalierly expanded in such a way as to force churches and religious orders to, without exception, provide insurance to cover abortifacients and contraceptives for their employees? That is recognized as a cynical abuse of power, constricting the constitutional freedom of religion for members of faith communities who find such practices immoral and abhorrent. The same principles can apply in areas of immigration policy, deployment of the military and the use of weapons, economics and free trade, and a host of other issues.

When one party adopts a platform that is openly contrary to and actively opposed to the moral teaching of the Church, party adherents might feel discouraged at finding themselves having to choose between Church and party. So strong can party loyalty be that members often engage in intellectual gymnastics to try to stay aligned with both. The Church often loses the contest, leaving many Church members to ask how people can espouse such views and still consider themselves Catholics in good standing. One possible answer is that party loyalty is apparently better at de-forming consciences than the Church is at in-forming them.

Let's look at a few quotes from far brighter lights than the local pastor:

"We encourage all citizens, particularly Catholics, to embrace their citizenship not merely as a duty and privilege, but as an opportunity meaningfully to participate in building the culture of life. Every voice matters in the public forum. Every vote counts" (U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Living the Gospel of Life: A Challenge to American Catholics*, 1998). We have a baptismal call from Christ as prophets and missionaries, not to shove our faith down the throats of our fellow citizens, but to enlighten the public discourse with the *truth* which we have from Christ himself. There

is not one truth for when we are in church and another for when we are in the voting booth.

“The separation of church and state does not require the division between belief and public action, between moral principles and political choices, but protects the rights of believers and religious groups to practice their faith and act on their values in public life” (USCCB, *Catholics in Political Life*, 2004). Catholics have every right to expect that fellow Catholics elected to political office will faithfully represent the moral teachings of the Church in those areas and votes in which they have the freedom to do so. After all, no one finds it inconsistent that constituencies of other social groups and lobbies fully expect *their* representatives to represent *their* interests. Elections have consequences.

“Our nation’s tradition of pluralism is enhanced, not threatened, when religious groups and people of faith bring their convictions and concerns into public life” (USCCB, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, 2015). This means that voting a certain way because of our religious faith is just as legitimate as doing so for any other reason. Religion does not *interfere* in the political arena in such a case, but properly helps it to keep morally grounded. Our founding fathers in the U.S. knew that without a moral foundation, the constitutional government they had carefully constructed would crumble.

“As citizens, we should be guided more by our moral convictions than by our attachment to a political party or interest group. When necessary, our participation should help transform the party to which we belong” (USCCB, *ibid.*, 2015). If all the Catholics in each party actually voted as though their consciences had been properly formed by Catholic moral teaching, the civil discourse in our country might actually be able to accomplish much more in a less contentious manner.

Coming to a nursing home near you. Word from the formerly Catholic nation of Belgium is that a court has found a Catholic nursing home guilty of abuse and cruelty in not allowing a resident in their care to commit physician-assisted suicide. Her family sued the nursing home, and the home has been fined several thousand dollars. Where will this madness end? I’m sure that the Hemlock Society (now merrily known as “Compassion & Choices”) is licking its chops, just waiting for our courts to cite Belgian law as a precedent in extending the hand of death over anyone whose relatives (or the government?) thinks they’re living too long. Oh, don’t say it can’t happen here. Look at all that’s happened here that even the social deconstructionists would have thought impossible just 20 years ago!

Welcome to St. Anne’s! A hearty mid-summer welcome to all St. Anne’s Society members and to all who join us from Monday, July 18, through Tuesday, July 26, for our 76th annual St. Anne’s Novena! We were honored for our Diamond Jubilee celebration last year when Bishop Walkowiak joined us for an evening. He won’t be here this year, but counts on our prayers for him and for the whole Diocese, as well as for all of our own intentions. God bless you!

Fr. Den

Did you hear? Word has it that the Washington Redskins are finally dropping their offensive name. The owner has announced that from now on, the team will simply be known as “The Redskins.” Numerous nationwide surveys found that the inclusion of the word “Washington” is overwhelmingly considered to impart a negative image of poor leadership, scam artists, mismanagement, corruption, cheating, lying, and graft, and is not a suitable term for young fans to hear when discussing football. (WARNING: This item is a spoof of actual news reports, but should indeed be taken VERY seriously. ☺)