

Homily on *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility* from the Catholic Bishops of the United States with Introductory Note

*At the same time, some challenges have become even more pronounced. Pope Francis has continued to draw attention to important issues such as **migration, xenophobia, racism, abortion, global conflict, and care for creation**. In the United States and around the world, many challenges demand our attention.*

*The threat of **abortion remains our preeminent priority** because it directly attacks life itself, because it takes place within the sanctuary of the family, and because of the number of lives destroyed. At the same time, we cannot dismiss or ignore other serious threats to human life and dignity such as racism, the environmental crisis, poverty and the death penalty. -Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship - Introductory Note*

1. Formation of Conscience

5. ...the role of the Church in the **formation of conscience** and the corresponding moral responsibility of each Catholic to bear, receive, and act upon the Church's teaching in the lifelong task of forming his or her own conscience. Foremost amongst those teachings are the four basic principles of Catholic social doctrine: **the dignity of the human person, the common good, subsidiarity, and solidarity** (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, no. 160).

7. In this statement, we bishops **do not intend to tell Catholics for whom or against whom to vote.**

10. What faith teaches about the dignity of the human person, about the sacredness of every human life, and about humanity's strengths and weaknesses helps us see more clearly **the same truths that also come to us through the gift of human reason**. At the center of these truths is respect for the dignity of every person. This is the core of Catholic moral and social teaching. **Because we are people of both faith and reason, it is appropriate and necessary for us to bring this essential truth about human life and dignity to the public square.**

A Well-Formed Conscience

17. **The Church equips its members to address political and social questions by helping them to develop a well-formed conscience. Catholics have a serious and lifelong obligation to form their consciences in accord with human reason and the teaching of the Church.**

CCC1 #1791 THIS IGNORANCE CAN OFTEN BE IMPUTED TO PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY. THIS IS THE CASE WHEN A MAN "TAKES LITTLE TROUBLE TO FIND OUT WHAT IS TRUE AND GOOD, OR WHEN CONSCIENCE IS BY DEGREES ALMOST BLINDED THROUGH THE HABIT OF COMMITTING SIN." IN SUCH CASES, THE PERSON IS CULPABLE FOR THE EVIL HE COMMITS.

CCC #1792 -IGNORANCE OF CHRIST AND HIS GOSPEL, BAD EXAMPLE GIVEN BY OTHERS, ENSLAVEMENT TO ONE'S PASSIONS, ASSERTION OF A MISTAKEN NOTION OF AUTONOMY OF CONSCIENCE, REJECTION OF THE CHURCH'S AUTHORITY AND HER TEACHING, LACK OF CONVERSION AND OF CHARITY: THESE CAN BE AT THE SOURCE OF ERRORS OF JUDGMENT IN MORAL CONDUCT.

2. Prudence

The Virtue of Prudence

20. ... Catholics may choose different ways to respond to compelling social problems, but we cannot differ on our moral obligation to help build a more just and peaceful world through morally acceptable means, so that the weak and vulnerable are protected and human rights and dignity are defended.

3. Intrinsically evil actions

22. *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. Such actions are so deeply flawed that they are always opposed to the authentic good of persons. These are called “intrinsically evil” actions. **They must always be rejected and opposed and must never be supported or condoned.** A prime example is the intentional taking of innocent human life, as in abortion and euthanasia. In our nation, “abortion and euthanasia have become preeminent threats to human dignity because they directly attack life itself, the most fundamental human good and the condition for all others” (Living the Gospel of Life, no. 5). It is a mistake with grave moral consequences to treat the destruction of innocent human life merely as a matter of individual choice*

23. *Similarly, human cloning, destructive research on human embryos, and other acts that directly violate the sanctity and dignity of human life are also intrinsically evil. These must always be opposed. Other direct assaults on innocent human life, such as 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.*

26. *St. John Paul II explained the importance of being true to fundamental Church teachings:*

Above all, the common outcry, which is justly made on behalf of human rights—for example, the right to health, to home, to work, to family, to culture—is false and illusory if the right to life, the most basic and fundamental right and the condition for all other personal rights, is not defended with maximum determination. (Christifideles Laici, no. 38)

The US Bishop echoed this:

Any politics of human dignity must seriously address issues of racism, poverty, hunger, employment, education, housing and health care. ... But being 'right' in such matters can never excuse a wrong choice regarding direct attacks on innocent human life. Indeed, the failure to protect and defend life in its most vulnerable stages renders suspect any claims to the 'rightness' of positions in other matters affecting the poorest and least powerful of the human community.”
- *Living The Gospel Of Life: A Challenge To American Catholics, A Statement by the Catholic Bishops of the United States 1998*

What about Capital Punishment?

67. *...The Catholic Church has accepted the death penalty in the past for particularly egregious crimes when there was a serious continuing threat to society and no alternative was available. But our nation's continued reliance on the death penalty cannot be justified. Because we have other ways to protect society that are more respectful of human life, the USCCB supports efforts to end the use of the death...*

42. *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 if a candidate's position on a single issue promotes an intrinsically evil act, such as legal abortion, redefining marriage in a way that denies its essential meaning, or racist behavior, a voter may legitimately disqualify a candidate from receiving support.*