

Fr. Curtis Miller October 17-18, 2020 Homily for the 29th Sun. of Ordinary Time

With a simple coin, Jesus taught a profound truth. “Render unto Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God.” We owe certain duties to our civil government, but we also owe much more to God Himself. He created us, so we owe our very lives to God, and should strive to live according His commandments.

As Jesus teaches, governments have a legitimate right to require citizens to fulfill their civic duties for the common good. As citizens in a democracy, one of our greatest privileges is the right to vote, to have a voice in deciding how we are governed. Many people around the world and throughout history have longed for this right. We possess it because of the labors and sacrifices of our ancestors. We must not take it for granted, but rather recognize it as a great blessing and a serious responsibility. Our choices in the voting booth impact not just ourselves, but our fellow citizens.

As Catholics, we must vote with a well-formed conscience, upholding truths taught by our faith, that are also universally applicable and accessible to anyone through reason. Paramount among these truths is the dignity of the human person and the right to life. God created each one of us in His own image and likeness, giving us dignity and rights that must be respected. That is why the Church is so insistent in opposing threats to human life, like abortion.

In a famous speech at the National Prayer Breakfast in 1994, St. Mother Teresa called abortion the “greatest destroyer of peace today,” reasoning that if governments permit a mother to take the life of her child in the womb, then they cannot credibly oppose any other taking of human life. When we vote, opposing abortion is morally required. But this is not an issue that exists in isolation. Mother Teresa continued, saying that if we oppose abortion, then we must also uphold policies that support pregnant mothers, and that uphold the dignity of every human life, including the poor, the elderly, people of every race, refugees, and victims of war. Mother Teresa backed up her words by spending her life serving people in need. If we are to be consistently pro-life, then we too must vote and act in ways that uphold the dignity of every human life.

Voting often requires us to make difficult choices because politics is messy. A particular law or candidate may uphold many of the truths we must support, but also promote causes that are directly opposed to other important truths. We cannot pretend that making these choices is easy. Political decisions are not absolutes. They require a prudential choice of the best option, or the lesser of two evils.

Whether in this presidential campaign or any other election, my job as a priest is not to take sides or endorse candidates. Rather, my duty is to share the truth of the Gospel with you, to help form your consciences well, so that you can make your own decisions.

Whenever Church leaders have taken sides in political disputes, it has been problematic. Consider the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s. A socialist government cruelly persecuted the Church, even murdering priests and nuns. In response, many Church leaders supported General Francisco Franco, a devout Catholic who fought back against this persecution. But when Franco won the war, he established himself as a fascist dictator, and he committed equally evil atrocities against his enemies, claiming the Church's support. For this reason, many Spaniards today have rejected the Church, seeing it as complicit in these evils.

We Christians must uphold sacred truths when we vote and encourage others to do the same. Inevitably, this will lead to arguments with people who disagree. In those situations, let us distinguish between truths that are non-negotiable (like the right to life) and our personal opinions about topics that are more open to debate (such as economic policies). Let us be firm in the truth, but also listen respectfully to the perspectives of people with whom we disagree, rather than dismissing them as stupid or an enemy. Perhaps we will learn something new to correct or refine our viewpoints.

Also, if we are open and respectful, it is more likely that we will be able to convince the other person of important truths. We can only change laws to better protect human life and dignity if we first change hearts and minds.

In our Church community, we must not merely replicate the political divisions of the outside world. Rather, we Christians ought to be unified in challenging both sides of the political divide to better conform with truth and right.

And so we pray: May God bless the United States, and may He help us live in ways that are worthy of His blessing. Amen.