

The primary purpose of the book of Proverbs is to teach wisdom, that is practical expertise. “Ultimately wisdom, or sound guidance, aims at the formation of character” (Prov Intro). A king is wise if he brings peace and prosperity to his kingdom. An individual is wise if he knows how to provide for the prosperity of his family and how to live a long and healthy life. Wisdom is a gift of the Holy Spirit. Saint Thomas Aquinas explains it this way. “Wisdom is both the knowledge of and judgment about “divine things” and the ability to judge and direct human affairs according to divine truth.”ⁱ

Our first reading from Proverbs, begins with a little wisdom in relation to the king. “Like a stream is the king’s heart in the hand of the LORD; wherever it pleases him, he directs it.” (21:1) It requires great skill and power to direct a stream of water, but through the building of a canal, water can be redirected to bring life to arid lands. One may say the same about a king. Powerful like water, he does not always go where we want him to.

In a little over a month’s time, we will vote in national elections. Together as citizens we have the responsibility to influence the direction of our nation. Ideally, we would like a leader like Saint Louis who was wise enough to ask for God’s help to direct human affairs according to divine truth. We hear echoes of this in our Gospel reading when Jesus does not give special treatment to his own relatives, but rather surprises everyone by exclaiming: “My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and act on it” (Luke 8:21).

I encourage everyone to vote wisely and to ask God’s help to choose leaders at the local, state and national level that will work for the common good and defend our inalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. The Catechism of the Catholic Church puts the right to vote on an equal footing with the right to defend our country.

It is the duty of citizens to contribute along with the civil authorities to the good of society in a spirit of truth, justice, solidarity, and freedom... Submission to legitimate authorities and service of the common good require citizens to fulfill their roles in the life of the political community... [It is] morally obligatory to pay taxes, to exercise the right to vote, and to defend one’s country. (CCC 2239-2240)

We need an informed conscience to cast a vote wisely in accordance with God’s truth. The US Bishop’s explain: “We recognize that the responsibility to make choices in political life rests with each individual in light of a properly formed conscience, and that participation goes well beyond casting a vote in a particular election.”ⁱⁱ As you weigh the many factors that form your own conscience, you’ll easily recognize the great wisdom required to vote prudently. Consider the following:

- Those who are most vulnerable require the greatest protection from society. This includes the elderly, the terminally ill and the unborn child.
- Liberty and justice must be extended to all. We should not divide along lines of race, ethnicity, or economic equality, rather we should unite for the common good.
- Healthy families strengthen society. God is the author of marriage between one woman and one man and has asked us not to divide what he has united.
- With the wealth of our national resources, the common good calls us to address poverty, empower individuals to experience the dignity of work and provide a safety net that provides for basic health care and other necessities of life.

Beyond our vote, whenever we gather as a community for Mass, we ask God’s help for those who govern. The second prayer of the faithful is specifically designed for public authorities and the salvation of the whole world (GIRM #70).

Truly, we need God’s help to be faithful citizens and to cast votes wisely. Likewise, God needs us to help build a better and more just society. “Guide me, Lord, in the way of your commands” (Psalm 119:35).

ⁱ catholic.com/magazine/print-edition/the-seven-gifts-of-the-holy-spirit

ⁱⁱ usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/forming-consciences-for-faithful-citizenship-title