

**July 18, 2021/Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time- Deacon Roger Vierra**  
**“Our Catholic Responsibility in Public Policy”**

Last week, some of you may have heard Father Mark’s sermon . . . he discussed the responsibility which we have as baptized Catholics to live and teach our faith. It’s a particularly important responsibility for our Church’s modern-day shepherds, our bishops, as well as for Catholic publicly elected officials at all levels of government. As we heard in today’s first reading, “Woe to the shepherds who mislead and scatter the flock in my pasture.” It seems with every day that passes, this responsibility becomes more and more important.

Today, when I think about the challenges our church faces in teaching the ways of God, I keep returning to a simple picture --- the image of a loving parent, gently telling her young child not to touch a searing hot burner on the stove. She does this not be in charge, but to save her child from harm.

Last month, the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops gathered to achieve two important objectives. First, to welcome parishioners back to mass post-pandemic. And, second, in the words of the bishops, to “bring greater awareness . . . (that) “the Eucharist is the heart of the Church and the heart of our lives as Catholics.” The potential outcome of this statement, is that the Holy Eucharist may be denied to elected officials who publicly endorse policy which conflicts with the teachings of Jesus Christ and His church --- that is to say, the Holy Eucharist may be denied to elected officials who endorse policy which is not pro-life. Now, some in media, and even a minority within the group of bishops, have suggested that there is a political motive behind this --- to cast a shadow over the current administration.

When a private citizen chooses to become a public official, that person gains great responsibility in the creation of public policy. And, particularly for Catholic elected officials, they are often faced with the choice of acting according to the views of their electorate or of God.

While these elected officials may not feel it at the moment, the statement by the bishops can be a very positive development both for them as Catholics, and for the entire church. This attention and increased scrutiny reminds our elected officials and citizenry that an important choice between the whims of man and the truths of God is at stake. Saint John Henry Newman asks this question, “What I am asking

is not whether you merely regard man's opinion, but whether you set it before God's judgment." For Catholic elected officials, this means that there is no acceptable reason for supporting public policy decisions which conflict with the teachings of God.

There is a book entitled, "Rebuking Sin", in which author Thomas Doolittle shares, "Do not keep your notions of right and wrong to yourselves . . . . We daily influence each other for good and evil; let us not be the occasion of misleading others by our silence, when we ought to speak." We Catholics, and particularly our bishops, have the responsibility to teach the truths of our Catholic faith to believers and to non-believers --- it is the time to speak clearly and with conviction --- reminding our elected officials and our neighbors that we have a responsibility to God and His church before other authorities. Our faith motivates us to say with conviction that the greatest public good is found through following the teachings of Jesus Christ. That public policy which is based upon the love of God, which instructs and encourages souls to more closely follow His word, makes it more likely that we will reach true happiness in this world and in the world to come. As with the parent and the child by the stove, if policy is merely intended to establish and maintain authority, it's poor policy. But, if it's intended for the health and happiness of its' people, it's guided by the love of God.

Now, if we ask our Catholic elected officials to be strong in the face of secular criticism, are we able to do what we ask of them? Are we willing to share our views with those in our circle of friends and others within our community? If we are able, then we have done our part in supporting the teachings of Jesus Christ and our bishops. But, this won't be easy to do --- it will be important for us to be persistent in our faith, and patient with those who disagree with us. When all has been said, and we have done all that we are capable of doing to help teach and bring souls closer to God, public policy makers and everyone else, will we be able to love those who disagree with us, who say "no" despite our good will and efforts. If we are able, then at least we've shown them unconditional love and this may be the greatest lesson we can teach them.

May our Lord Jesus Christ give you His peace.