

Oct 28, 2016

A Message from Bishop Peter Libasci:

"Why don't bishops tell us who to vote for?"

I hear this question over and over from people who want bishops to identify particular candidates that Catholics must vote for or against. The answer to this question is an important one.

In the very first chapter of the Book of Acts, we see 120 disciples gathered with Peter. The job at hand is to choose a replacement for Judas and to restore the fellowship of "The Twelve." Significantly, however, it is not Peter who makes the selection. Rather it is the assembly of the faithful that proposes two names, from which one (Matthias) is chosen by the drawing of lots. Notice that Peter does not use his office to compel a particular result, but rather he leaves the choice to the Holy Spirit working through the company of believers.

Now, an American election is obviously a far different sort of thing. But the point of that narrative from Acts is the same one that underlies why we bishops do not instruct the faithful to vote for or against particular candidates: there are certain rights and responsibilities that the Church entrusts to bishops, and there are certain rights and responsibilities that the Church entrusts to the lay faithful.

How each one of us carries out the awesome responsibility of our baptism depends on our particular calling in life. Bishops accompany the People of God and carry out the ministry of teaching. The lay faithful are called, among other things, "to cultivate a properly formed conscience and to impress the divine law on the affairs of the earthly city" (to quote from chapter 43 of the Second Vatican Council's *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*). The Church recognizes that expertise in secular matters, and in particular the affairs of the political world, rests with the laity.

As the Constitution goes on to say:

Let [the lay faithful] realize that their pastors will not always be so expert as to have a ready answer to every problem (even every grave problem) that arises: this is not the role of the clergy: it is rather up to the laity to shoulder their responsibilities under the guidance of Christian wisdom and with eager attention to the teaching authority of the Church.

If you are reading Catholic Citizenship News, you may be familiar with [***Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship***](#). This teaching document lays out the

issues which we think are indispensable for Catholics to consider if they are to cast votes with well-formed consciences. *Faithful Citizenship* is an important way that we bishops have tried to help you in your decision-making in this election. If we have provided you with the tools, however, it is up to each one of you to actually put those tools to use.

As the publication of *Faithful Citizenship* would show, there are also some practical reasons why bishops do not endorse candidates. If for instance a particular candidate were to be so manifestly unfit that no Catholic could in good conscience vote for that candidate, a bishop's instruction to vote a particular way would be pointless because the lay faithful, after considering the issues that are set out in *Faithful Citizenship*, would undoubtedly reach the proper conclusion on their own. If, on the other hand, there is legitimate disagreement among people with well-formed consciences regarding how an election should turn out, then bishops in various dioceses might actually issue endorsements for different candidates. So it is wise for the Church to have faith in the faithful.

The Holy Father recently made some informal remarks concerning what we should do in this election, and I think his advice is the best way to conclude this: "Study the issues well, pray, and choose with your conscience." Here at the end of 2016, the responsibility for what you do on election day lies just where the Holy Spirit put it on the day that you were baptized: in your hands. May that same Spirit guide you as you cast your votes on November 8th.

Sincerely in Christ,

Bishop Libasci