

“THE SECRET SANCTUARY”: CONSCIENCE AND CIVIC DUTY

We’re in the home stretch. Soon enough, the lawn signs will come down! The USCCB document, “Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship” (abbreviated FC) gives concrete assistance to Catholics desiring to **form their consciences properly** with respect to their participation in the civic life of our nation. “The Church’s obligation to participate in shaping the moral character of society is a requirement of our faith.” (FC, 9) It continues: “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.” (FC, 10)

Responsible citizenship is a **virtuous activity** and our participation in political life is not to be considered merely optional. Rather, it is constitutive of what it means to live in a society, a community of persons. The Church views it as a moral obligation. As **Pope Francis** wrote in *Evangelii Gaudium*, “People in every nation enhance the social dimension of their lives by acting as committed and responsible citizens” (EG, 220). Committed and responsible. Before him, Pope Benedict XVI noted: “The Church cannot and must not take upon herself the political battle to bring about the most just society possible. She cannot and must not replace the State. Yet at the same time she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice.” (*Deus Caritas Est*, 28) Popes have been **consistent** on this point—it is a **delicate balance**, but one for which we must strive in faith and the exercise of prudence in action.

Conscience has been described as “the voice of God resounding in the human heart,” and this resonates with most people because we experience it as such. But it is **not a feeling**— rather, as our **Catechism** teaches, conscience “is a **judgment of reason** whereby the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act that he is going to perform, is in the process of performing, or has already completed. In all he says and does, man is obliged to follow faithfully what he knows to be just and right” (CCC, # 1778) But what does that look like in real life? It begins with “a willingness and openness to seek the truth and what is right by studying Sacred Scripture and the teaching of the Church as contained in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.” (FC, 18). When a classmate asked my Freshman High School biology teacher, “Mr. Reymann, how do you spell photosynthesis?”— he **never even looked up** from the front of the room. He merely pointed to the dictionary. Figure it out— form a hypothesis and then try it out. There is **no excuse** for not doing your homework.

The same is true with respect to our Catholic life. FC #7 notes: “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.” A properly formed conscience begins with an informed mind, knowing Catholic teaching and **applying its principles** to your prudential decisions. Familiarize yourself with the candidates’ positions on key moral issues and how they relate to the legislative, executive and judicial branches of government. Discern the **non-negotiables**, knowing that it is highly unlikely that any single candidate reflects your views 100% of the time. Going online to view a sample ballot is extremely helpful, researching the candidates’ positions. Yes—I vote for the judges, school board members, and even the dog catcher! There is nothing worse than circling an unfamiliar name, being unprepared.

After research and careful study of the issues, a **decision awaits**. Pray, reflect and carefully weigh the policy positions of the candidates. We employ the **virtue of prudence** which enables us “to discern our true good in every circumstance and to choose the right means of achieving it” (CCC, #1806). People are bound to follow their consciences; however, if poorly formed, those consciences could— and likely would— be in error. “Following one’s conscience” is not a “get out of jail free” card, a free pass for whatever we feel is right. But in the end, we are neither to violate the dictates of our conscience, nor be pressured into going against it. After all, we are not voting for 7th grade Student Council, but for critical offices at a local, state and national level.

The rancor that has become evident in the politics of the past generation is most troubling. But history teaches that it is not new. Pamphlets published by surrogates during the **John Adams-Thomas Jefferson** campaign of 1800 were truly **ugly**. A newspaper editor and Jefferson supporter called Adams a “hideous hermaphroditical character, which has neither the force and firmness of a man, nor the gentleness and sensibility of a woman.” Ouch! But such attacks obviously pre-dated a 24/7 media news cycle. If you watched the **Nixon-Kennedy** debate of 1960 on You Tube, you would be amazed at the civility of the tone. By the late 1980’s, that was largely gone. At times, the Church’s ideals seem little more than *pie-in-the-sky* optimism. In his encyclical *Deus Caritas*

Est, Pope Benedict XVI explained that “charity must animate the entire lives of the lay faithful and therefore also their political activity, lived as ‘social charity.’” (no. 29). We could all use a little “social charity” now– if not from the candidates, from ourselves!

- Remember your deceased loved ones by **writing their names** on the **All Souls envelopes** located on the **tables** by the piers or at the Information Desk. Deposit them in one of the four drop boxes located by an exit, and they will be placed on the altar on Nov. 2. A free-will offering is most appreciated, though not required.
- It is amazing what one finds tucked beneath a shelf in a **stack of drawers**. While removing some sacristy drawers in some need of repair, a worker found a veritable **treasure trove** underneath, including: a September 1944 parish bulletin (asking for more volunteers for the choir!), an October 14, 1958 commemorative program for the solemn dedication of the Cathedral (how timely!), receipts for 15 altar boy surplices, and a detailed hand drawn liturgy schematic for Holy Week 1947. Wow– right up my alley!
- Horrific **attacks** continue on churches around the globe. In the Archdiocese of Santiago, Chile, St. Francis Borgia and the Church of the Assumption of the BVM were **set ablaze**, both amongst the oldest in the city.
- Some records are **never** meant to be broken. Long-time sports columnist **Sid Hartman** died last week at the age of 100. Retirement was never an option for Sid. His final column was published on the morning of his death. Beginning in 1944, Hartman is credited with **21,235 bylined stories**. Just try to wrap your head around that one. This column is just my 436th since coming to the Cathedral.
- The process for beatification has opened for a missionary doctor known as the “mother of lepers” in Poland. **Wanda Błęńska** spent 40 years in Uganda, caring for those suffering with Hansen’s disease. After serving in the Polish resistance movement during World War II, she moved to Uganda in 1951, serving as chief physician in a leprosy clinic. She died in 2014 at the ripe old age of 103! She may now be referred to by the title “Servant of God.”

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector



After the dust was removed, a remarkably well-preserved September 1944 parish bulletin reveals Sunday Masses at 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11 o'clock!