

Dear Students,

Saturday, October 3, 2020 will mark exactly one month before the national election. As Catholics we should take very seriously our civic responsibility to vote in this election. We are privileged to live in a country in which our individual vote affects the course of our political and public life. As Catholics we also have the responsibility to vote with a well formed conscience that reflects our Catholic Social Teaching especially the mandate to uphold the dignity of every person from conception to natural death.

For many of you this election is your first time casting your ballot and you may have questions on how to form your conscience in order to vote. The Catholic Bishops of the United States have produced a document which I encourage every Catholic to read, *Forming Consciences For Faithful Citizenship* which you can easily access on line. They have also produced a summary, *The Challenge of Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*. These documents lay out the complexity of forming our conscience in this political moment. Casting our ballot of course presupposes that we are engaged in the political process and know the all planks of a party's platform and the voting records and statements of each candidate measured against the seamless garment of Catholic Social Teaching.

In addition to encouraging you to exercise your right to vote, I am very concerned that some priests who hold positions on both sides of the political spectrum, have made public declarations that you, the Catholic voter, are committing grave sin if you vote for this or that politician. Please, take note that all these priests have been publicly corrected by their Bishops. When anyone tells you that if you vote this way or that way you will commit grave sin – know that they are in error.

The documents which I have recommended to you explain the Church's position on issues and how one must avoid voting for a candidate *because* they hold specific positions contrary to the Church's moral teaching. That indeed would be sinful. With all the confusion created by different Catholics who have a large audience for their personal views, it is imperative that we form our own correct conscience for voting according to sound moral principles which the Church teaches.

It is also important that in our university people are respectful of one another's political positions. Civility is one of the hallmarks of a healthy community. Christians can and should be able to disagree with one another without fear of being ostracized or enduring personal attacks. After any spirited political discussion it is important that all parties leave the conversation knowing that they are valued and respected as members of the community.

Finally, there is one more important task in these weeks prior to voting. Pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in casting your vote. Wrestle in prayer with the complexity of making the best political decision. Let us pray for one another as we take our civic responsibility seriously as Catholic people and cast our vote with a clear and well-formed conscience.

Peace,

Fr Jude

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