

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As election day in our country approaches, people have been asking for guidance as they consider the candidates and their votes. While the Church and its clergy cannot endorse a particular candidate or political party, we do have a responsibility to encourage you to understand the issues in the context of Church teaching and to help you in this area of the ‘proper formation of your conscience’.

This election, at both the federal and state level, will shape the future of our nation for generations to come. Some would prefer that Catholics and others of faith remain silent, or they will say that such beliefs have no place in public square. Such views run contrary to our fraternal bonds and commitment to the common good as equal and valued citizens. Since politics is about securing justice in society, it is a fundamentally moral activity. As Catholics, our belief is that there are fundamental truths about the human person and society that are accessible to both faith and reason. We therefore have a right and a duty to participate in the public square in a way that reflects these truths, both for the good of our community and for the glory of the God who created us.

Let each citizen remember at the moment he is offering his vote that he is not making a present or a compliment to please an individual – or at least that he ought not so to do; but that he is executing one of the most solemn trusts in human society for which he is accountable to God and his country.

—Samuel Adams, The Boston Gazette on April 16, 1781

When the Declaration of Independence was penned, three rights were deemed unalienable, given to all human beings by their Creator and, therefore, unable to be taken away from someone or given away by someone else. They are *Life, Liberty*, and the pursuit of *Happiness*. That they were written in this order was no mistake—even the Founding Fathers knew that the right to life surpassed all others in importance: without the right to life, none of the other rights could be protected. The right to life was, and is, preeminent.

On this issue of preeminence of the right to life – and its source in our Creator - the Founding Fathers and the Church are agreed. Yet issues of life are under attack, and they appear in our national conversation and laws in terrible ways, as threats to the unborn (abortion), and as threats to the vulnerable, the disabled, and the elderly (euthanasia or assisted suicide). The Church teaches that abortion, euthanasia, and assisted suicide, as direct attacks on innocent human life, are all *intrinsically evil*—always and everywhere profoundly immoral. And *preeminent* among these is the most fundamental threat to the beginning of life itself—abortion. Pope Francis has made it clear that if we fail to protect

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

—The Declaration of Independence, July 4th, 1776

life, no other rights matter. He also said that abortion is not primarily a Catholic or even a religious issue: it is first and foremost a human rights issue.

All too often we hear people say: *As a matter of faith I am against abortion, but I cannot impose my belief on others.* It is not a matter of imposing a belief, but of being committed to the truth about human life, which, as biological science confirms, begins at conception. Those who argue otherwise are not committed to reason, but to the false belief that there are some human beings not deserving of the protection of our laws.

By our Baptismal Call, and in our prayer to the Father, all children of God are pledged to seek God's Kingdom and fulfill His will, *on earth as it is in heaven.* We vow that we will strive for perfect integrity in submitting our will to the will of God. We cannot with integrity pray the words of the *Our Father*, or say "Amen" when receiving the Eucharist, and then be passive on the issues that destroy God's creation. This is true for all people of faith, elector, and elected official.

In the case of an intrinsically unjust law, such as a law permitting abortion or euthanasia, it is therefore never licit to obey it, or to take part in a propaganda campaign in favor of such a law, or vote for it.

— Pope St. John Paul II

There are some who will claim that, by focusing on the *preeminent* issue of abortion, the Church is promoting single-issue voting that will tend to support a particular candidate or party. The Church will always act to promote the dignity and value of every human life from conception to natural death. We care about both mothers and their children, born and unborn, as well as the poor, the immigrant, the sick, the disabled, the elderly, those who are marginalized, and those on death row. We seek to promote a Culture of Life through our teaching and through our ministries, some of which are threatened by the extreme positions taken by some on issues of life and the family.

As you endeavor to be an educated voter with a properly formed conscience as regards the issues we face as individuals, families, and as one nation under God, you can count on the prayers of your Shepherds. The political parties and their candidates have provided you with information that they believe will help you to understand their positions on issues that are important to you and for the good of the country. The Church engages in this political process by providing you with the faith context by which to judge some of these positions. This is a difficult time in our nation and a critical time to not only exercise your right to vote, but to do so with the utmost integrity.

Most Reverend Felipe J. Estevez
Bishop of the Diocese of Saint Augustine
October 7, 2020