

FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP
HOMILY NOTES
TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
21 September 2008
“Conscience Formation for Citizens”

First Reading: Isaiah 55:6-9

vs. 6: “Seek the Lord while he may be found, call him while he is near.”

vs. 8: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.”

We are told to seek the Lord, to desire the understanding of his thoughts and ways. Understanding begins with an open and humble heart, docile to God’s will and the Church’s teaching. If we truly desire and are open to understanding the deepest truths of life, God will help us to understand. This is precisely what the Church refers to as the formation of conscience, which is a necessary foundation for making sound moral choices in public life.

- *“The formation of conscience includes several elements. First, there is a desire to embrace goodness and truth. For Catholics this 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. It is also important to examine the facts and background information about various choices. Finally, prayerful reflection is essential to discern the will of God. Catholics must also understand that if they fail to form their consciences they can make erroneous judgments” (Faithful Citizenship¹, 18).*

Responsorial Psalm 145:2-3, 8-9, 17-18

vs. 18: “The Lord is near to all who call upon him, to all who call upon him in truth.”

In order for our consciences to be properly formed, we must ask the Holy Spirit to guide our hearts and minds.

- *“The Church equips its members to address political and social questions by helping them to develop a well-formed conscience. Catholics have a serious and lifelong obligation to form their consciences in accord with human reason and the teaching of the Church. Conscience is not something that allows us to justify doing whatever we want, nor is it a mere ‘feeling’ about what we should or should not do. Rather, conscience is the voice of God resounding in the human heart, revealing the truth to us and calling us to do what is good while shunning what is evil. Conscience always requires serious attempts to make sound moral judgments based on the truths of our faith. As stated in the Catechism*

¹ “Faithful Citizenship” refers to the document *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States* (14 November 2007) and can be read online at www.usccb.org/faithfulcitizenship/FCStatement.pdf.

of the Catholic Church, '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' (no. 1778)" (Faithful Citizenship, 17).

Second Reading: Philippians 1:20c-24, 27a

vs. 21: "For to me life is Christ [...]."

vs. 27: "Only, conduct yourselves in a way worthy of the Gospel of Christ."

St. Paul reminds us that "life is Christ." In order for us to live in Christ, we must conduct ourselves accordingly and desire all the more to conform our will to his. As we prepare to vote in this year's election we must ask ourselves, what does Christ want for our nation?

- *"Aided by the virtue of prudence in the exercise of well-formed consciences, Catholics are called to make practical judgments regarding good and evil choices in the political arena. There are some things we must never do, as individuals or as a society, because they are always incompatible with love of God and neighbor. Such actions are so deeply flawed that they are always opposed to the authentic good of persons. These are called 'intrinsically evil' actions. They must always be rejected and opposed and must never be supported or condoned. A prime example is the intentional taking of innocent human life, as in abortion and euthanasia. In our nation, 'abortion and euthanasia have become preeminent threats to human dignity because they directly attack life itself, the most fundamental human good and the condition for all others' (Living the Gospel of Life, no. 5). It is a mistake with grave moral consequences to treat the destruction of innocent human life merely as a matter of individual choice. A legal system that violates the basic right to life on the grounds of choice is fundamentally flawed. Similarly, direct threats to the sanctity and dignity of human life, such as human cloning and destructive research on human embryos, are also intrinsically evil. These must always be opposed. Other direct assaults on innocent human life and violations of human dignity, such as genocide, torture, racism, and the targeting of noncombatants in acts of terror or war, can never be justified" (Faithful Citizenship, 21-23).*

Alleluia Verse: "Open our hearts, O Lord, to listen to the words of your Son."

Again, we are reminded today of our need to be open to the Word of God that we might be formed according to the mind of God.

Gospel: Matthew 20:1-16a

vs. 15-16: "'Are you envious because I am generous?' Thus, the last will be first, and the first will be last."

Today's Gospel is disturbing to those who do not understand the justice of God. He loves all with equity and treats all with justice. The Father does not show favoritism, for we are all his beloved

sons and daughters. We are therefore called to be open to those around us and to treat them with equal respect for their dignity: born and unborn, rich and poor, citizen and alien – we are all children of God, brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus. As we look to the upcoming election and beyond, we recognize that our commitment to the dignity of every human being must shape our decisions as citizens.

- *“We are a nation founded on ‘life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,’ but the right to life itself is not fully protected, especially for unborn children, the most vulnerable members of the American family. We are called to be peacemakers in a nation at war. We are a country pledged to pursue ‘liberty and justice for all,’ but we are too often divided across lines of race, ethnicity, and economic inequality. We are a nation of immigrants, struggling to address the challenges of many new immigrants in our midst. We are a society built on the strength of our families, called to defend marriage and offer moral and economic supports for family life. We are a powerful nation in a violent world, confronting terror and trying to build a safer, more just, more peaceful world. We are an affluent society where too many live in poverty and lack health care and other necessities of life. We are part of a global community facing urgent threats to the environment that must sustain us. These challenges are at the heart of public life and at the center of the pursuit of the common good” (Faithful Citizenship, 2).*

The Ten Goals of Faithful Citizenship (cited directly from paragraph 90):

- *Address the preeminent requirement to protect the weakest in our midst—innocent unborn children—by restricting and bringing to an end the destruction of unborn children through abortion.*
- *Keep our nation from turning to violence to address fundamental problems—a million abortions each year to deal with unwanted pregnancies, euthanasia and assisted suicide to deal with the burdens of illness and disability, the destruction of human embryos in the name of research, the use of the death penalty to combat crime, and imprudent resort to war to address international disputes.*
- *Define the central institution of marriage as a union between one man and one woman, and provide better support for family life morally, socially, and economically, so that our nation helps parents raise their children with respect for life, sound moral values, and an ethic of stewardship and responsibility.*
- *Achieve comprehensive immigration reform that secures our borders, treats immigrant workers fairly, offers an earned path to citizenship, respects the rule of law, and addresses the factors that compel people to leave their own countries.*
- *Help families and children overcome poverty: ensuring access to and choice in education, as well as decent work at fair, living wages and adequate assistance for the vulnerable in our nation, while also helping to overcome widespread hunger and poverty around the world, especially in the areas of development assistance, debt relief, and international trade.*
- *Provide health care for the growing number of people without it, while respecting human life, human dignity, and religious freedom in our health care system.*
- *Continue to oppose policies that reflect prejudice, hostility toward immigrants, religious bigotry, and other forms of discrimination.*

- *Encourage families, community groups, economic structures, and government to work together to overcome poverty, pursue the common good, and care for creation, with full respect for religious groups and their right to address social needs in accord with their basic moral convictions.*
- *Establish and comply with moral limits on the use of military force—examining for what purposes it may be used, under what authority, and at what human cost—and work for a “responsible transition” to end the war in Iraq.*
- *Join with others around the world to pursue peace, protect human rights and religious liberty, and advance economic justice and care for creation.*