

OUR POLITICAL LANDSCAPE



It is a time when people are divided by their allegiances to different leaders. These are not mere differences of opinion. These are not minor divisions. To the contrary, the community has separated along the fault lines of choice for one leader over another. The resulting damage are rivalries where there are winners and there are losers.

I am describing a Corinth landscape that causes St. Paul to address the situation; I could just as likely be describing America's political landscape.

Paul offers encouraging instruction to the Corinthians: "I urge you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree in what you say, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and in the same purpose."

Catholics were almost evenly divided in their choice for President-elect. This near-even split exemplifies the varying political views that course through the veins of the Catholic body. While we are one body – one Body in Christ – we are not one voting bloc, nor should we be. We form our *individual* consciences to become faithful citizens. This life-long obligation underscores the truth that our faith and our politics are not separate ideologies that we can compartmentalize, using them as needed. Couldn't we call ourselves "Faith-full Citizens?" Of course we could because within each one of us there can be no separation of church and state, but an obligation to live our faith on Sunday and through every day of the week. Even in politics.

As Catholics, *with our formed consciences*, we remain "united in the same mind and in the same purpose." The details may be sticky but the principles are non-negotiable: respect for life and human dignity; stewardship of creation; justice for the oppressed; food to the hungry; protection for strangers; a hunger and thirst for righteousness; and a commitment to peacemaking. (You will hear many of these again in next Sunday's readings.)

There are two lessons we can learn from the complaints of many about the choices for President. First, elections are more than the top of the ticket. Other races offer us a wonderful choice of candidates who will commit the next part of their lives to public service.

Second, and more importantly, while we Catholics may have wrung our hands over the choices for President because neither embodied the principles of our faith, we can and should have an epiphany that Faithful Citizenship is more than casting a vote – albeit very important – leaves us with the choices given us.

Faithful Citizenship must be more than a quadrennial exercise to remind ourselves of our Catholic teachings and then attempting to wedge a square candidate into the round hole of our faith. By engaging in advocacy and politics today, we can eventually shift the culture to where a candidate's positions are generally aligned with the Catholic Church: respect for life and human dignity; stewardship of creation; justice for the oppressed; food to the hungry; protection for strangers; a hunger and thirst for righteousness; and a commitment to peacemaking.

We may have different approaches on *how* to achieve these, but principles of our faith form the foundation of our Faithful Citizenship. We remain "united in the same mind and in the same purpose": to build God's kingdom of heaven here on earth.

(Readings for the 3rd Sunday of Ordinary Time)



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