

## CONSCIENCE IS THE VOICE OF GOD IN OUR HEARTS



I grew up in the 60's the 70's – a time of Vietnam, Civil Rights, Watergate, War on Poverty, and Earth Day. Obviously I was going to be a Democrat.

I grew up in a staunch Republican family. My mother thought President Nixon was the finest president in her life time, if not ever. My father was voted Mr. Young Republican of Illinois in 1968. Obviously I was going to be a Republican.

Yet I did not grow up and become a Democrat. Nor did I grow up and become a Republican. I grew up, continued to mature in and deepen my faith, and became a stronger Catholic. My values weren't cemented after the 70's. They didn't stop forming with the Nixon presidency. While a senior in high school I had the occasion to read the Sermon on the Mount with the Beatitudes. No document before or since has had a greater effect in shaping my values: nourishment for the seeds of my conscience.

As the bishops note in *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, we need to form our consciences in an *ongoing manner*. How do we do this?

1. When examining any issue or situation, we must begin by **being open to the truth** and what is right.
2. We must **study Sacred Scripture** and the **teaching** of the Church.
3. We must **examine the facts** and **background information** about various choices.
4. We must **prayerfully reflect** to discern the will of God (*Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, no. 18).

The *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* adds:

5. The **prudent advice** and **good example** of others support and enlighten our conscience.
6. The **authoritative teaching** of the Church is an essential element.
7. The **gifts of the Holy Spirit** help us develop our conscience.
8. Regular **examination of conscience** is important as well (p. 314).

In these eight steps to forming our consciences there is not an admonition to vote because someone or some institution told us how we must vote and who we must vote for. As St. Thomas More said, "Little as I meddle in the conscience of others, I am certain that my conscience belongs to me alone. It is the last thing that a man can do for his salvation: to be at one with himself."

Around the dinner table with friends I will be debated for supporting a candidate that they don't like because of his or her positions. In my work I am often challenged that of course the Office and I wouldn't support one candidate over another; it's obvious how faithful Catholics must vote. (I hear this from all sides.) The truth is obvious.

Cardinal Donald Wuerl, writing for the U.S. Bishops, reminds us that, "We therefore have an obligation to ascertain that what we say or hear or read is really the truth." Jesus was *the* Truth yet his apostles differed from each other and occasionally disagreed with each other. Jesus *is* the Truth and it is okay to entertain different opinions, be on different paths at a different pace as we journey to the Truth.

Forming our consciences is a life-long journey and though there are only a few weeks before this election, we still have time to pray, to open ourselves up to the truth and to seek the Truth.

We still have time to form our consciences.



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