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Annunciation Parish, Shumway, Illinois
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The Twenty-second Sunday of the Year (A)

The prophet Jeremiah is often called the "reluctant prophet." He has received this unpleasant epithet because, though he does perform the task given him by the Lord, he does so with great hesitation.

He is reluctant because, as he says, "everyone mocks me" and he has become "an object of laughter" (Jeremiah 20:7). The prophet is mocked because his words - the very words the Lord gave him to speak - concern "violence and outrage" against Israel (Jeremiah 20:8).

Naturally, Jeremiah did not want to speak this message; no one enjoys being a messenger of doom, yet such messages must sometimes be spoken for the good of all.

Jeremiah tried not to speak the word of the Lord but found that he could not hold it in. He said, "I grow weary holding it in, I cannot endure it" (Jeremiah 20:9). And so he spoke out against the evils of his day. This task the Church shares with the prophets of old.

Speaking from within the Church, the Apostle Paul says to us, "Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect" (Romans 12:2).

The words of the Divine Master himself today are not very different than these. He says to us, "You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do" (Matthew 16:23). We must then think with Jesus, not with the world, and act in accord with the will of Christ.

Today it is my turn to speak a word that will likely bring mockery and even anger, yet it must be spoken nonetheless.

Several prominent Catholic politicians have recently claimed that the Church's teaching on abortion is unclear and uncertain. Consequently, these same politicians have claimed it is permissible to be a Catholic and still support abortion. Nothing could be further from the truth!

From the very beginning of the Church down to the present day, the Church has always condemned the evil act of abortion as a grave offense against the fifth commandment: "You shall not kill" (Exodus 20:31; Deuteronomy 5:17). This teaching has never changed; it has never wavered; it remains firm.

We know that of all of the choices we make in life that not every decision is of equal importance or of equal consequence. Whether I have cereal or fruit for breakfast is not as important as whether or not I am faithful to my spouse. Clearly, marital fidelity comes first, for the good of the spouses; for the good of the children; for the good of the Church; indeed, even for the good of the world.

We also know that "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."¹ Such actions are intrinsically evil and must "always be rejected and opposed and must never be supported or condoned."² One example - sadly becoming ever more frequent - is adultery. It is never permissible to be unfaithful to the marriage covenant and society can never condone adultery because it - in and of itself - is evil, wrong and immoral, always and everywhere.

When it comes to the voting booth it is the same: some issues carry greater weight than others and some can never be performed. We call this the hierarchy of values.

The first among these is the protection of human life, which includes abortion, euthanasia, embryonic stem cell research, and many others. The Church has always taught that

the direct and intentional destruction of innocent human life from the moment of conception until natural death is always wrong and is not just one issue among many. It must always be opposed."³

Every Catholic, therefore, has a moral obligation to do what he or she can to protect every human life because "a legal system that violates the basic right to life on the grounds of choice

¹ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States*, 22.

² *Ibid.*, 22.

³ *Ibid.*, 28.

is fundamentally flawed."⁴ Such a political system is flawed because "the right to life implies and is linked to other human rights - to the basic goods that every human person needs to live and thrive."⁵

Consequently, it is not possible - nor has it even been - for a Catholic to support abortion, euthanasia or other things that are contrary to life and the divine will. Nor is it permissible for a Catholic to vote in favor of a politician *because* of his or her positions on these "issues." To support such policies places one outside the Church, outside of the communion of the teaching of Jesus Christ.

Any Catholic - politician or not - who refuses to accept a central tenet of the Christian faith must not present him or herself for Holy Communion. To do so would be one great lie, for when we say, "Amen," to "the Body of Christ," we say that we not only believe in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist and not just a mere symbolic one, we also say that we believe all of the teachings of the Church or that we at least give the assent of faith to them.

In insisting upon this the Church is not using the Eucharist as a political tool; rather, she seeks to stop one of her children from committing a sacrilege by receiving the Body and Blood of the Lord unworthily thereby bringing death upon

⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

themselves (cf. I Corinthians 11:27). Withholding Holy Communion is not a punishment but a medicinal discipline to lead the one who has sinned in such a grave manner back to the fold of Christ.

Some will undoubtedly say, "Father, you're crossing the line of separation of Church and State." Such is not the case for what we are discussing is not a matter of Church and State but of faith and politics.

Faith requires something of us. It requires that we love both God and neighbor and that every decision we make, every word we speak and action we perform, be in keeping with the love of God and of neighbor, even in the voting booth. Faith can never be laid aside.

At the recent World Youth Day 2008, the Holy Father told us, "Life is not governed by chance; it is not random. Your very existence has been willed by God, blessed and given a purpose."⁶

We know this to be true, for if we consider our own individual existence we know that none of us chose to be born. Exploring the depths of our hearts we know ourselves to be creatures and that there is therefore a Creator, the Creator who knows us, loves us and wants us. We know that "each of us is

⁶ Pope Benedict XVI, *Address at Welcoming Ceremony*, 17 July 2008.

the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary."⁷

It is precisely because we are creatures that we cannot claim a right to end the life of any man, woman or child. We are not the Creator.

In speaking these words some will praise me and others condemn me. I speak these not for praise or condemnation, because they are the truth, the truth of the Gospel. And because these words are truth I must speak them.

Today, therefore, I make my own the words of Saint Paul: "If I preach the gospel, this is no reason for me to boast, for an obligation has been imposed on me, and woe to me if I do not preach the gospel" (I Corinthians 9:16)!

⁷ *Ibid.*, 24 April 2005.