

The Rev. Daren J. Zehnle
St. Anthony of Padua Church, Effingham, Illinois
19 October 2008

The Twenty-ninth Sunday of the Year (A)
World Mission Sunday

Many people today approach Jesus in the same manner as the Pharisees. They say to the Lord, "Teacher, we know that you are a truthful man and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth" (Matthew 22:16). Though they speak these words with their lips, they do not hold them in their hearts. Are not many of this same ilk today?

How many today, claiming to be faithful disciples, approach the Lord and his Church saying, "We know you speak the truth, but..." Such people do not actually acknowledge the fundamental truth of Jesus' teachings and of the teachings of the Church.

If we consider the words of Jesus, "repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God," we see that faith requires something of us (Matthew 22:21).

That coin produced by the Pharisees belongs to Caesar because his image is imprinted upon it. Where is the image of God to be found? It is found in every human life. "God created man in his image, in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27). Every human life - from the moment of conception to the moment of natural death - belongs to God and not to Caesar.

Yet there are some who refuse to acknowledge this and claim the "right" to take another's life. There are even some Catholics who claim it is morally permissible to support and to vote for such a candidate. My dear friends, 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, 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

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.

must never be supported or condoned."² Such actions can never be condoned by society because they - in and of themselves - are 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. As Catholics, we must bring our faith to the voting booth and we must vote in accord with the faith of Jesus Christ.

The first among these is the protection of human life, which includes the so-called issues of abortion, euthanasia, embryonic stem cell research, cloning 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

As Catholics we are faced with a number of issues that are of concern and should be addressed, such as immigration reform, healthcare, the economy and its solvency, care and concern for the poor, and the war on terror... There are many possible solutions to these issues and there can be reasonable debate among Catholics on how to best approach and solve them. These are matters of "prudential judgment." *But let us be clear: issues of prudential judgment are not morally equivalent to issues involving intrinsic evils. No matter how right a given candidate is on any of these issues, it does not outweigh a candidate's unacceptable position in favor of an intrinsic evil such as abortion or the protection of "abortion rights."*⁴

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁴ Letter of Bishops Kevin Farrell and Kevin Vann, 8 October 2008, 4.

Every Catholic 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 is fundamentally flawed."⁵ Pope John Paul II reminded us, "it is impossible to further the common good without acknowledging and defending the right to life, upon which all the other inalienable rights of individuals are founded and from which they develop."⁶

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. "To vote for a candidate who supports the intrinsic evil of abortion or 'abortion rights' when there is a morally acceptable alternative would be to cooperate in the evil - and, [is,] therefore, morally impermissible."⁷ To support such policies places one outside the Church, outside of the communion of the teaching of Jesus Christ.

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

⁵ USCCB, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship.*, 22.

⁶ Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 101.

⁷ Letter of Bishops Kevin Farrell and Kevin Vann, 8 October 2008, 5.

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."⁸ If my life is willed, blessed and purposed, so is every other life.

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 the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary."⁹

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

As we celebrate today the World Mission Sunday and we consider the terrible and unspeakable horrors of abortion and the many other offenses against life, these questions rise

⁸ Pope Benedict XVI, Address at Welcoming Ceremony, 17 July 2008.

⁹ *Ibid.*, Homily, 24 April 2005.

within us: "What will become of humanity and creation? Is there hope for the future, or rather, is there a future for humanity? And what will this future look like?"¹⁰

Too often we are tempted to think the future is bleak and dark. Rather than succumb to despair, we must always remember: "Christ is our future," and "his Gospel is a 'life-changing' communication that gives hope, throws open the dark door of time and illuminates the future of humanity."¹¹

We know that "today there are countless people who are waiting for the proclamation of the Gospel, those who are thirsting for hope and love."¹² Some of these people are not yet born and some of them are here among us today. We must bring the light of the Gospel, the message of hope, to them! "Humanity needs to be liberated and redeemed."¹³ There is only one Liberator and Redeemer: Jesus Christ, and his Gospel is life!

Let us then proclaim his Gospel to the ends of the earth both by our words and by our actions. If we allow the Gospel of Jesus Christ to shape and inform every decision we make then the light of his love will shine through our lives and we will bring his hope and love to a darkened world. Let each of us, then, abandon ourselves to God and render to him what is his. Amen.

¹⁰ Pope Benedict XVI, *Message for World Mission Sunday 2008*.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*