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|  | **Election Year Politics:**  **Voting a Catholic Conscience -**  **Voting From a Catholic Perspective (Part 2)** | | |
| What’s the Point? | This is part 2 of the election year examination of social justice advocacy and political participation. This class is designed to take the information from the last class and have the teens apply it to their decision, with a comparison to their initial thoughts from last week. | | |
| **Background Information** | ***Reference***   * ***CCC****: ¶ 2234-2246;* * **NAB** : *1 Tim 5-6;Gal 6:2-10; 2 Thes 3:6-15;* * [*Veritatis Splendor*](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_06081993_veritatis-splendor_en.html)Section II, *Conscience and Truth**54-68*   “*Whatever is hostile to life itself, such as any kind of homicide, genocide, abortion, euthanasia and voluntary suicide; whatever violates the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, physical and mental torture and attempts to coerce the spirit; whatever is offensive to human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution and trafficking in women and children; degrading conditions of work which treat laborers as mere instruments of profit and not as free responsible persons: all these and the like are a disgrace, and so long as they infect human civilization they contaminate those who inflict them more than those who suffer injustice, and they are a negation of the honor due to the Creator*.” (Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 27)  Well, subtly is an art, and there is nothing subtle about that statement. But it is not a statement made is a vacuum – Vatican II did not just appear out of nowhere and make such grand pronouncements. All of these things are and always have been “*hostile to life itself*” and the Church has always (at its best) stood against them. Blessed John Paul himself uses part of this paragraph to emphasize his own teachings about life and the Cultures of Life and Death.  When it comes to American elections, it is important for us to place ourselves as Catholics within that same Culture of Life, the Body, dead but raised, broken and shared. Christ lives and if I believe that then I live, and I live as if I am alive. To condone, support or even ignore any of these atrocities invites more than just moral evil but imperils our very souls – as Jesus tells us, ‘we should know better’. Scripture tells us again and again that as God’s People, we are meant to give Him glory, not give Him a bad name. “*It is not enough to do good works; they need to be done well. For our works to be good and perfect, they must be done for the sole purpose of pleasing God*”. (Alphonsus Maria De Liguori, *The Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ*) As Catholics who just happen to be Americans, we must strive, like Catholics everywhere, to create this Culture of Life in all places and for all people.  We vote because it is an effective means of advocacy. It is by no means the only one and after the vote the advocacy must continue, but it is effective. In 2008, President Obama beat John McCain among Catholics by 54% to 45%. Four years earlier in the 2004 election, John Kerry – the first Catholic nominee for president since John F. Kennedy in 1960 who in turn was the first since Al Smith in 1928 – lost the Catholic vote to George W. Bush. These watershed events probably caused the greatest shift in political recognition of the Catholic voting bloc. In 2012 both major parties have a Catholic nominee for Vice President. Each also had New York Archbishop Timothy Dolan give the closing prayer at their political conventions, one which was similar but challenging the platforms of both parties. It is the nature of the parties to think of us as a fragmented ‘minority position’ and take the ‘Catholic Vote’ for granted, and that has probably been the greatest lesson for all. The 2008 election provoked Democrats to take Catholic outreach more seriously; the heavily Evangelical Republican party had to consider Catholics a major force. Catholic leadership on moral and justice issues is no longer lumped in behind other authorities; it has become a case of, as the old commercial says “When E. F. Hutton speaks, people listen”.  But really, we do not care! We challenge, we cajole, we vote, and we let the parties catch up with us. Our task is to continue to work the two feet of social justice and to present a unified front through that. Therein also lies the caveat. If we continue to elect officials who present Catholic moral teaching from their respective party’s position rather than the position of the Church and Conscience then we continue to allow the parties to segment and muddle not just the Catholic vote but the message as well.  Our most important tool is engagement. We understand the nature of the world, the nature of sin, the concupiscent nature of humans and human institutions. But we stand forward and work and advocate against that notion of ‘normalcy’. For us, what is normal is the love God in Jesus Christ. Not sin and suffering but compassion and service. It is not ideology which drives us; human ideologies are fickle like human law. God’s Law, God’s love, is objective and eternal – it does not concern itself with one’s country of origin, or creed, or deservedness, or party, or sense of patriotism: only with the Common Good. We engage the world rather than retreat from the world and let it take care of itself or let it come to its own bad end; that is not how we ‘roll’! We see the Kingdom and we want it for all, not just the few, not just the privileged, not just the holiest. We want what God wants: the salvation of the world! To want anything else is to eschew the will of God.  We do not vote to promote evil. “*And why not say—as we are accused and as some claim we say—that we should do evil that good may come of it? Their penalty is what they deserve*.” (Rom 3:8) While the candidate we vote for may promote a moral evil, we do not vote for them for that purpose. That outright vote would obviously be evil, and the bishops point that out. But we may also not vote for a candidate who may promote a moral evil on the hope that we will lose the fight against that moral evil, kind of a turning the blind eye hope, or the thinking that the fight against one moral evil overcomes all others which the bishops also condemn. We can also not vote for a candidate in the hope that the means they employ will justify the ends which we seek. Moral evil is moral evil. Moral evil cannot promote good. Our job is to weight the moral evils which face our society and apply the Seamless Garment to them. Our job is then to choose candidates (at all levels of government, not just the presidency) who will provide the best means of achieving those ends. And once that is done to then begin to advocate for all necessary change.  In the end it is important to remember that there is only one Messiah who saves us. There will never be another or will there ever be a need for another. We put our trust in God first, and in the efforts of the Spirit through us. Only God saves.  And so we vote. It is not easy and if you read what the bishops tell us, it is almost impossible! But we recall that Jesus said, “*For human beings this is impossible, but for God all things are possible*.” (*Mt* 19:26) We make our vote based on the best our conscience can guide us, against moral evil as best we can, and we remember that it does not end with our vote, it merely begins there. The work of salvation is never done until Christ hands back the Kingdom to his Father! | | |
| Materials Needed | * PowerPoint * Computer * Overhead projector * Computer and access to internet * Presidential ballots and ballot boxes * Election decorations | | |
| **Attention Grabber** | ***“We Are The Catholic Vote”* (2 min)**  Play the movie found at <http://www.catholicvote.org/videos/videos>  called *“We Are The Catholic Vote”*.  *OR* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=zuoTU0cdA00>  (And or an older, dated [Video](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=61wj4tJICcc).)  **POST VIDEO QUESTION:**   1. What does this video tell others about us?   ***“2012 Vice Presidential Debate Question”*** **(5 min)**  Video clip of 2012 Vice presidential candidates speaking about their Catholicism and abortion during their debate found at <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/video/vice-presidential-debate-2012-biden-ryan-questioned-catholic-17459020>(allows closed captioning) *OR if that does not work* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KOpb9irG3Cw>  **POST VIDEO QUESTIONS:**   1. What did they get right? 2. What did they get wrong?   When Pope Benedict visited the United States in 2008, he asked the U.S. bishops a question: **“Is it consistent to profess our beliefs in church on Sunday, and then during the week to promote business practices or medical procedures contrary to those beliefs?”**  The Holy Father then answered his own question: **“…Any tendency to treat religion as a private matter must be resisted. Only when their faith permeates every aspect of their lives do Christians become truly open to the transforming power of the Gospel.” (*Religious Freedom*, USCCB)**  ***“****Take This Sabbath Day (The West Wing)****”*** **(5 min)**  The Catholic president is the last person in line to stop an execution of someone who killed bad people; he has sought help and many opinions have been offered, and the final minutes approach:  <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QfLZrPq136I>  **POST VIDEO QUESTION:**   1. Compare this to the Vice president candidates. | | |
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| **Outline** | **Prayer**: | *Sirach 4:1-10.* | |
| **Presentation**: | *PowerPoint.* | |
| **Activity**: | *Video Clips* | |
| **Table Discussion**: | *Questions*. | |
| **Post Discussion:** | *Voting.* | |
| **Closing Prayer**: | *Group Prayer/Petitions.* | |
| **Prayer** | **Introductory Prayer:** (**2 min,** after candle is lit…**)**    ***Sirach 4 :1-10 4***  *My child, do not mock the life of the poor; do not keep needy eyes waiting. Do not grieve the hungry, nor anger the needy. Do not aggravate a heart already angry, nor delay giving to the needy. A beggar’s request do not reject; do not turn your face away from the poor. From the needy do not turn your eyes; do not give them reason to curse you. If in their pain they cry out bitterly, their Rock will hear the sound of their cry. Endear yourself to the assembly; before the city’s ruler bow your head. Give a hearing to the poor, and return their greeting with deference; Deliver the oppressed from their oppressors; right judgment should not be repugnant to you. Be like a father to orphans, and take the place of a husband to widows. Then God will call you his child, and he will be merciful to you and deliver you from the pit.* | | |
| **Pre-discussion Presentation** | Presentation (15 min) | | |
|  | Election Activity These opening passages from Scripture remind us of what we are about. In their larger context they sit within a section about how wisdom and justice go together. Last week we talked about that idea the wisdom of God and right action. This week we will put that thinking to the test.  Before we start, know that there is no such thing as a “Catholic Candidate” – that is not so say there are not Catholics who are candidates but that the Church endorses no candidate. The job of the Church is to teach us how to vote not who to vote for. The Church only endorses the teachings of the Church and it is our job to use our informed consciences and not party rhetoric to decide.  SEE OFFLINE POWERPOINT OR ONLINE RESOURCES  Answer Questions at [www.isidewith.com](http://www.isidewith.com)   1. Identify what the moral issue is in each question, or if there is one. 2. Find Scriptural and Catechism quotes to help us understand what the guidance on the issue should be. | | |
| **Activity / Table Talk** | Table Discussion (35 min) | | |
|  | In the discussion it is very important to elicit opinions of the participants and not focus on those of the discussion leader. With the materials provided, the discussion leader should be able to remind the teens why certain issues are important to Church social teaching and where they disagree with either candidate or party platform. In addition, teachers should be clear that there is no “Catholic candidate” and especially, there are not ‘stupid’ or heretical or un-American decisions (as long of course as they follow the simple guidelines against participation in moral evil by voting specifically for the moral evil). It is a matter of judgment and conscience for individuals after prayer and thoughtful consideration of doctrines of our Faith and not party ideologies. The main point is that in every election Catholics should be guided by Christ’s teaching as reflected and expanded in Catholic social teaching relating to the common good and not to primarily selfish considerations or the rhetoric of the candidates. The following questions exist as a backup to the www.isidewith.com site, though they can be used in concert as well. With the site the concerns are similar – what is the issue, what is the Church’s stand on that issue and what candidate best articulates that stand. At the end you add all of that together and then ‘vote’.   1. Using the materials provided, briefly review the two primary presidential candidate’s views on the issues. Note that there are other additional candidates who may be running including those on the Green and Libertarian tickets and encourage students to spend additional outside of class time reviewing those candidate’s positions if not available at class time. 2. Reviewing the seven themes of Catholic social teaching ask the students which of the candidates they think will most reflect each of those seven themes and why. 3. What issues should be most important to you as a Catholic when considering which candidate you would vote for in this presidential election? Why? 4. Are some issues more important than others? Why? Is it permissible for Catholics to vote for a presidential candidate who supports abortion? Under what circumstances? One who advocates war? Under what circumstances? 5. This is a very contentious election and people are very emotional about the choices. It is fairly certain that people supporting the candidate who loses will be disappointed (angry?) Remembering Catholic social themes that are important, and the concept of the “common good”, how should people whose candidate loses behave after the election? Why? Is it important for Americans to respect elected officials with whom they do not agree? If so, why so? If not, why not?   Some Scripture passages to examine:   * Dt 30:19 – Following God is life. * Psalm 139: 13-14 – From my beginning I am who I am * Dt 24:17-22 – Care for the immigrant and marginalized * Zec 7:9-10 – Do justice * Jer 22:16 – Our good comes from the good we do for others * Lk 4:18 – Our call to the poor and marginalized as the Body * Lk 10:25-37 – Focus on God and living * Mt 25:31-46 – Our judgment on our actions * Jas 2:13-17 – Being good citizens   "In the Catholic Tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation. This obligation is rooted in our baptismal commitment to follow Jesus Christ and to bear Christian witness in all we do." (*Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship,* 13*)* | |
| Post-Discussion Activity | ***Reminder* (1 min).** | | |
|  | All students and teachers will be requested to fill out their ballots and bring them up to a central ballot box where there will be counted and the results delivered the next class. Students will be asked to go from the ballot box into the prayer circle. | | |
| Closing | **Announcements and Prayer (5 min).** | | |
|  | **Group Prayer**  Intercessions  ***Prayer for Our Country***  God, bless our nation and make it true to the ideas of freedom and justice and brotherhood for all who make it great. Guard us from war, from fire and wind, from compromise, fear, and confusion. Be close to our president and our statesmen; give them vision and courage, as they ponder decisions affecting peace and the future of the world. Make me more deeply aware of my heritage; realizing not only my rights but also my duties and responsibilities as a citizen. Make this great land and all its people know clearly Your will, that they may fulfill the destiny ordained for us in the salvation of the nations, and the restoring of all things in Christ. Amen | | |
| Reminder | **\*\*\*\* REMEMBER IMPORTANCE OF RECORDING ATTENDANCE!!** This is a legal document! Please, write down on your attendance sheet the name of any teen at your table, whether they are on your roll or not. | | |
| Attachments | **Below:**   * *Key Principles of Catholic Social Teaching* and *Conscience* * Excerpt from *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* (USCCB) * Presidential candidate position summary | | |

**Human Rights**

**Solidarity**

**Dignity of Work**

**Option for the Poor**

**Family/ Community Participation**

**Human Dignity**

**Care For Creation**

**Conscience is:**

* Who we are at the deepest level
* Prudent judgment of actions as compatible with the best of who we are
* Based on objective moral standards
* Always to be followed, if well-formed and certain
* Always a good, when well-formed, even if not always right

**Conscience is not:**

* Feeling guilty or a lack of guilt
* A good angel on one shoulder telling us what to do and a bad angel on another tempting us to do what is wrong
* Simply one’s subjective opinion or feeling
* Always certain; one can have a doubtful conscience
* Always right; one can at times follow one’s conscience and make a morally wrong decision

**Excerpt from** [***Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship***](http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/upload/forming-consciences-for-faithful-citizenship.pdf) **(USCCB)**

“9. The Church’s obligation to participate in shaping the moral character of society is a requirement of our faith. It is a basic part of the mission we have received from Jesus Christ, who offers a vision of life revealed to us in Sacred Scripture and Tradition. To echo the teaching of the Second Vatican Council: Christ, the Word made flesh, in showing us the Father’s love, also shows us what it truly means to be human (see *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 22). Christ’s love for us lets us see our human dignity in full clarity and compels us to love our neighbors as he has loved us. Christ, the Teacher, shows us what is true and good, that is, what is in accord with our human nature as free, intelligent beings created in God’s image and likeness and endowed by the Creator with dignity and rights.

10. What faith teaches about the dignity of the human person and about the sacredness of every human life helps us see more clearly the same truths that also come to us through the gift of human reason. At the center of these truths is respect for the dignity of every person. This is the core of Catholic moral and social teaching. Because we are people of both faith and reason, it is appropriate and necessary for us to bring this essential truth about human life and dignity to the public square. We are called to practice Christ’s commandment to “love one another” (Jn 13:34). We are also called to promote the well-being of all, to share our blessings with those most in need, to defend marriage, and to protect the lives and dignity of all, especially the weak, the vulnerable, the voiceless. In his first encyclical letter, *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict XVI explained that “charity must animate the entire lives of the lay faithful and therefore also their political activity, lived as ‘social charity’” (no. 29).”

“17. 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 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).

18. 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.”