

2020 Elections and Catholic Social Teaching
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“Repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God.”

Following the COVID-19 diagnosis of President Donald Trump and his wife Melania, the former Vice President Joe Biden and his wife Jill, tweeted an important and humane message to our President and the First Lady.

Mr. Biden asked all of us to pray “for the health and safety of the First Lady and the President of the United States.” In his tweet, he wrote, “My wife Jill and I pray that they will make a quick and full recovery ... This cannot be a partisan moment. It must be an American moment ... we have to come together as a nation.”

Biden's message was accompanied by missives from heads of state across the globe and from leaders on both sides of the aisle.

The words of consolation and prayer introduced a much needed, if only temporary, pause in the dynamics of acrimony and division that have marked much of America's political life.

If only for a brief moment, this unexpected turn of events has opened up the possibility for all of us to be united as Americans and members of the human family as we face important election year decisions that will impact us directly – our nation, our state, our local community, and our families.

During this past year alone we have faced difficult and vexing issues.

Earlier in the year, the COVID pandemic appeared on the world stage, encroaching on every aspect of daily life, threatening our sense of well-being, taking a staggering toll on human life and health, sparking massive unemployment, and triggering economic uncertainty across the world.

In May, we witnessed disturbing footage of the death of George Floyd, accompanied by both peaceable public protests and some demonstrations that devolved into riots and arson, indiscriminate destruction, and opportunistic looting.

In September, we learned of the death of Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, followed by the nomination of Appeals Judge Amy Coney Barrett to the highest court in the land.

In the months leading up to the election, we have witnessed new levels of incivility, partisan rhetoric, and political advertising in some very damaging forms.

In the face of these sometimes overwhelming forces, Pope Francis, our Holy Father, put us on notice that “[The Church] cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in building of a better world, or fail to reawaken the spiritual energy that can contribute to the betterment of our society.” ([Fratelli Tutti, #276](#))

In the face of these seemingly insuperable odds, I hold that the Church offers to you and me a 'North Star'. It will help both Catholics and people of goodwill to navigate in this ocean of complexity, cacophony, and confusion.

The Church offers a body of Social Teaching, disturbingly unfamiliar to the average Catholic, and sometimes called "the Church's best kept secret."

Catholic Social Teaching helps us to make good decisions, wise choices, whether in choosing a particular party, voting for a particular candidate, uncovering hidden agendas, or revealing unintended consequences so often embedded in legislative proposals.

Catholic Social Teaching flows from the very heart of the Catholic Church.

It is founded on the words of Sacred Scripture and Tradition, the wisdom of papal, conciliar, and episcopal documents, and bolstered by the writings of the great Saints and Doctors of the Church.

Taken together, Catholic Social Doctrine helps guide us through this morass of social, political, and moral dilemmas we face today as disciples of the Risen Lord.

Catholic Social Teaching is predicated on a number of important premises, beginning with the unwavering conviction that every person, without exception, is fashioned in the image and likeness of God. An unrepeatable gift from God, and our brother and sister in Christ.

It was back in 1979, in his homily at the Capital Mall, that now Sainted John Paul II set the stage for Catholic Social Teaching in this nation. He introduced the principles of Catholic Social Teaching as the *sine qua non* for Catholics across the world. On that day, he threw down the gauntlet and opened up his remarks with a powerful defense of the precious unborn life here and across the globe. This is what he said:

I do not hesitate to proclaim before you and before the world that all human life – from the moment of conception and through all subsequent stages – is sacred, because human life is created in the image and likeness of God. Nothing surpasses the greatness or dignity of the human person . . . And so, we will stand up every time that human life is threatened. When the sacredness of life before birth is attacked, we will stand up and proclaim that no one has the authority to destroy unborn life. ([Holy Mass at the Capital Mall, 7 October 1979](#))

Are not the words of the late Holy Father more salient than ever before, as we watch certain lawmakers passing statutes or proposing legislation not only to keep abortion legal through all nine months of pregnancy, but even opening the doors to infanticide.

This is why the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has retained that the protection of unborn life as its "preeminent priority," because annually nearly one million unborn lives are extirpated in these United States, with 9,000 unborn children taken by abortion in our State of Nevada alone.

Catholic Social Teaching is the Church's response to the troubling question posed in the Gospel of Matthew, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give

you drink? When did we welcome you away from home or clothe you in your nakedness? When did we visit you when you were ill or in prison? And the king will answer them: 'I assure you, as often for one of these little ones you did it for me.' (Mt. 25:44)

The authority of Sacred Scripture then explains the Church's focus on the common good and our undying solidarity with the weak, the poor, the vulnerable, the marginalized, victims of racism, xenophobia, the unemployed, the elderly, and the infirm.

Yes, Pope Francis affirms that our call to holiness requires a firm and passionate defense of the innocent unborn. But "equally sacred," he writes, "are the lives of the poor, those already born, the destitute, the abandoned, the underprivileged, the vulnerable infirm, the elderly, people exposed to covert euthanasia, the victims of human trafficking, new forms of slavery, and every form of rejection," ([Gaudete et Exsultate, #101](#)), along with those waiting incessantly for legal pathways to legal immigration.

In articulating the doctrine of Catholic Social Teaching, the Church never intends to tell Catholics for whom or against whom to vote. Never. But rather, Catholic Social Teaching helps to form the Catholic conscience in accord with the mind of sacred Scripture and in light of the Church's hallowed body of moral and social doctrine.

With this foundation, "Catholics are better able to evaluate policy positions, party platforms, and candidates' promises and actions in light of the Gospel and the moral and social teaching of our Church..." ([Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, #41](#)).

The Church offers you a framework, the framework to help our people "to see beyond party politics, to critically analyze campaign rhetoric, and to choose their political leaders according to policy, not party affiliation, or mere self-interest." ([Living the Gospel of Life, #33](#)).

The principles of Catholic Social Teaching provide a lens through which to view sensitive and timely social and moral issues, like the repeal of the death penalty, assisted suicide, gender reassignment, and the plethora of issues we face as intentional, responsible Catholics.

Dear friends, Catholic Social Teaching enjoins us "to treat with respect those with whom we disagree, to dismantle stereotypes, and to build productive conversation in place of (the) vitriol." ([Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, pages 7 & 8](#))

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus speaks those memorable words to the Pharisees who willfully plotted against him. To them he said, "Repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God." (Mt. 22:21)

But in the doing, we cannot forget that even Caesar is accountable to God, who holds primacy in all things as the Author of Life and the King of all creation.

Help us, O Lord, to be faith-filled citizens, building a world enlightened by your Spirit, informed by the Gospel, and ultimately transformed by the power of your never ending love. Amen.