

For The Bulletin Of  
February 16, 2020



## THE SIXTH SUNDAY IN WINTER'S ORDINARY TIME

### *From Father Robert*

The child was asked to clean his room before he could go out to play. He replied, "What's the least I have to do?" He wondered if making the bed would count, or if the floor had to be clean too. Do his clean clothes need to be put away, or only left in the laundry basket and tucked away in his closet? What about under his bed? Would that be checked, and would it have to be clean? The frustrated father wondered when the child would want a clean room for his own sake and not simply because the father had asked. Such an attitude on the part of the child is similar to what's on display in today's gospel.

To those people who want to be right with God, but wonder what is the minimum required to achieve that relationship, Jesus has an answer. Jesus takes certain aspects of the law of Moses and expands them. Rather than a command not to kill, Jesus says, do not grow angry. Rather than a command not to commit adultery, Jesus says not to look at another with lust. In other words, the Mosaic Law is not simply the bare minimum we need to do to be right with God. Instead, we need to go above and beyond the letter of the law if we are to be followers of Jesus.

Merely fulfilling the minimum is not enough.

When Jesus responds in this way, we may crave a return to the minimum! How can I keep myself from growing angry, which is a natural human response to perceived injustice? The standard Jesus sets may seem impossible to realize. The statement about plucking out one's eye is certainly hyperbole, and recognized as such by the early church. The standard established by Jesus fulfills the law rather than abolishing it. Jesus' teaching goes to the heart of the matter. His advice to let "yes" mean "yes" and "no" mean "no" is a clear statement to that effect. Disciples of Jesus speak the truth without equivocation.

So, when we want to ask, "What's the least I have to do?" we may need to reconsider the question. When we desire a relationship with Christ for its own sake, and not simply because we've been somehow coerced, a life of faith flows naturally. We no longer count the minimum but instead live in a relationship of trust, fidelity, and love.



### *Living The Paschal Mystery*

Living our lives as disciples of Jesus means that we follow a standard different from the world's standard. Jesus' injunction not to look on another with lust, or with anger, is a prime indication of that. In the ancient world (and even in the modern), it can seem easier to cover up a temptation so as not to

deal with it. If looking on another causes lust, let's cover up the other or remove the other! But Jesus' response goes to the heart of a person. His response is not to cover up the temptation, but to challenge the person not to look on another with lust. Jesus places the responsibility on the individual, not on the object of temptation or anger. In this world there are things that will cause us anger. As disciples, we are not to harbor anger; we are not to harbor lust. Simply acting on these Christian precepts to eschew anger and lust will mark us as disciples, for we will be following a standard not of the world.

Did you find today's scriptures challenging? Here are some questions to help ground your response.

In the first reading the writer of the book of Sirach tries to convince his community that because God has given them free will, it is not possible to blame their sin on the "will of God." What role do you see personal responsibility taking in healing and reconciliation within your own family, in our parish, and community?

The psalmist tells us "Blessed are they who observe the Lord's decrees, who seek Him with all their heart." Who has been a model for you in living a life of whole-hearted service to God?

Writing to the Corinthians nearly two thousand years ago, St. Paul says, "We speak a wisdom to those who are mature, not a wisdom of this age." What is the wisdom the Christian tradition has to offer now to the age we find ourselves in?

In the gospel, Jesus urges His disciples to do more than simply follow the letter of the law. In your own spiritual life, what

motivates you to grow in wholeness each day?



During our 10:00 a.m. Holy Eucharist, we will join the family and friends of **Jose and Alicia Perez** in celebrating the milestone of 50 Years of Marriage. They will receive the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Blessing as a part of today's liturgy. And, the **Floral Arrangement before the Altar is placed to the Glory of God and In Honor of Their Fiftieth Wedding Anniversary.**

Congratulations! And may God continue to bless you with many years of happiness, the best of health, and the deepening of your love.



Beginning today, there will be a box in the narthex to receive your dried palms from last year's Palm Sunday liturgies to be burned in preparation for this year's Ash Wednesday. On Tuesday, February 25<sup>th</sup>, the dried palms will be burned in the Fire Brazier in the Gathering Plaza following the 8:00 a.m. Liturgy of the Word and Holy Communion. You may bring in your dried

palms during the week between 8:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. or to any of the liturgies next weekend.



### ***The Season of Lent 2020***

Welcome to our annual Journey Through Lent! The *Ceremonial of Bishops* reminds us that “the annual observance of Lent is the special season for the ascent to the holy mountain of Easter. Through its twofold theme of repentance and Baptism, the season of Lent disposes both the catechumens and the faithful to celebrate the Paschal Mystery” (249). While repentance is a well-known Lenten theme, many people are surprised to learn that Baptism is an integral part of the season as well, both for catechumens *and* the faithful.

Anyone who has ever attempted mountain climbing, or has even tried to walk up a steep hill knows that it is very hard work. The disciplines of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving that are part of our Lenten journey help us to build our spiritual muscles to ascend the mountain to Easter. This is no easy task for Christian disciples. But as the old cliché says, “no pain, no gain.”

There is an ancient tradition of chanting the Litany of the Saints at the beginning of the First Sunday of Lent, when the Church begins its ascent to the holy mountain. Both

the *Ceremonial of Bishops and Paschale Solemnitatis* recommend recovering this ancient practice. While this might seem like an odd custom, it is not without precedent, as the Litany of the Saints is also used during other important processions. At the Great Vigil of Easter, it is chanted as the Paschal Candle leads the Elect and their godparents to the saving waters of the Baptismal Font. The Litany of the Saints is chanted during conclaves as the cardinal electors process into the Sistine Chapel to elect a new pope. These important processional moments in the life of the Church remind us that we celebrate the heavenly liturgy every time we gather at the altar. They also remind us that we do not walk this journey alone. As we begin Lent, we invoke the intercession of the saints, women and men who took prayer, fasting, and almsgiving seriously, like so many other important aspects of our Christian life.

Many of the scripture readings throughout Lent speak of Jesus’ ascent. The Gospel for the First Sunday of Lent reminds us of the devil taking Jesus up a high mountain to tempt Him. On the Second Sunday of Lent, Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up a high mountain where He is transfigured before them. Later in Lent, we are reminded that Jesus goes up to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. It is there that He went to the Mount of Olives, where the crowds waved palm branches and branches of olive and shouted “Hosanna!” These “mountain” experiences helped prepare Jesus for His ultimate experience of going up, His being lifted up on the Cross on Calvary for the salvation of the whole world, as well as His Resurrection and later Ascension into heaven, where he sits at the right hand of the Father.

Like Jesus, we too are called to go up the mountain this Lent and Holy Week. The

mountain, though, will not likely be a specific place but rather a particular experience of the Paschal Mystery, of Christ's death and resurrection. The Lenten disciplines of Prayer, Fasting, and Almsgiving help us to prepare our bodies and spirits for the ascent to Jerusalem to celebrate Easter. In this way, the Prayer Over The Gifts on Ash Wednesday remind us that what we do on the exterior helps to move our interior and vice versa: "As we solemnly offer the annual sacrifice for the beginning of Lent, we entreat You, O Lord, that, through works of penance and charity, we may turn away from harmful pleasures and, cleansed from our sins, may become worthy to celebrate the Passion of Your Son." We are embodied beings who use our bodies to pray, fast, and give alms. St. Paul, in his Philippians hymn in the Second Reading on Palm Sunday reminds us that Jesus emptied Himself and took on the form of a slave. Our Lenten sacrifices allow us to empty ourselves so that we can be filled, once again, with the grace of the Paschal Mystery at Easter.



This pilgrimage up the holy mountain makes several important stops along the way to remind us of how important Baptism is to the season of Lent. The first step occurs on or near the First Sunday of Lent at the Rite of Election as catechumens come together from all the parishes of the Diocese to celebrate with the local Church that they have been chosen to be among God's elect.

After their call is acknowledged and they are judged worthy by the bishop, those chosen, now called "The Elect," come forward to write their names in the Book of the Elect. In doing so, they spiritually accept their invitation to the Easter Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Eucharist. On the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Sundays of Lent the scrutinies, three more stops on the way up the mountain, are celebrated with the Elect in the presence of the worshipping community. *The Rite for the Christian Initiation of Adults* teaches us that "the scrutinies are meant to uncover, then heal all that is weak, defective, or sinful in the heart of the elect; to bring out, then strengthen all that is upright, strong, and good." The Gospel passages of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan Woman at the Well, His giving sight to the Man Born Blind, and the Raising of Lazarus on these three Sundays are all clearly baptismal in focus and point to the water, light, and new life that come from the Sacraments of Initiation.



The Chrism Mass, celebrated at the cathedral, is one of the last liturgies of the Lenten season and likewise one of the final stops on the way up the mountain. Standing at the threshold of the Great Three Days, the clergy and faithful of the Diocese gather around its bishop as he blessed the holy oils that will be used for Baptisms, Confirmations, the Ordinations of bishops and priests, dedications of churches, Anointing of the Sick, and the anointing of catechumens in the coming year. The *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* reminds us that this "preeminent manifestation of the

Church is present in the full, active participation of all God's holy people in these liturgical celebrations, especially in the same Eucharist, in a single prayer, at one altar." The Entrance Antiphon for the Chrism Mass points to that greater reality of the one great High Priest and of His sharing that priesthood with us in the reception of the sacraments: "Jesus Christ has made us into a kingdom, priests for His God and Father. To Him be glory and power for ever and ever. Amen."

Lent is a joyful season, and while it may be serious, it is never sad. In the Gospel for Ash Wednesday, St. Matthew says, "When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites. They neglect their appearance so that they may appear to others to be fasting." Our fasting, as well as our praying and almsgiving, should be done to draw attention to Christ, not to ourselves. Preface I of Lent states: "For by your gracious gift each year, your faithful await the sacred paschal feasts with the joy of minds made pure, so that more eagerly intent on prayer and on the works of charity, and participating in the mysteries by which they have been reborn, they may be led to the fullness of grace that You bestow on Your daughters and son." This is quite a contrast to some predisposed notions about Lent that make it seem like a six-week extended Passiontide rather than a joyful season of conversion and turning anew toward the Gospel. While the Stations of the Cross and other devotions that emphasize the passion and death of Christ are appropriate during Lent, especially on Fridays, and as we move closer to the days of Holy Week, we must be sure to include opportunities that emphasize the two pillars of Lent, both repentance and baptism.

In his seminal work, *Great Lent*, Alexander Schmemman refers to lent as a time of

"bright sadness," which mentions a different form of sadness than most people are used to. He states, "As we make the first step into the 'bright sadness' of Lent, we see – far, far away – the destination. It is the joy of Easter, it is the entrance into the glory of the Kingdom. And it is this vision, the foretaste of Easter, that makes Lent's sadness bright and our Lenten effort a 'spiritual spring.' The night may be dark and long, but all along the way a mysterious and radiant dawn shines on the horizon." The lengthening of days, at least in the Northern Hemisphere, helps to emphasize this dawn on the horizon.



### **February 26, 2020**

8:00 a.m. - Holy Eucharist and the Imposition of Ashes

12:00 Noon - Liturgy of the Word and Imposition of Ashes

5:30 p.m. - Liturgy of the Word and Imposition of Ashes

7:30 p.m. - Sung Evening Prayer and Imposition of Ashes

*The offering is designated for our adopted parochial school of St. Peter Martyr, Pittsburg*



**Saturday, February 29, 2020**

The Penitential Procession and Great Litany  
4:00 p.m.

**Sunday, March 1, 2020**

8:00 a.m. and 10:00 a.m.  
The Penitential Procession and Great Litany



**Saturday, March 7, 2020**

4:00 p.m. Vigil Eucharist

**Sunday, March 8, 2020**

8:00 a.m. and 10:00 a.m. Holy Eucharist;  
The Gospel of the Transfiguration



**Saturday, March 14, 2020**

4:00 p.m. Vigil Eucharist

**Sunday, March 15, 2020** 8:00 a.m. and  
10:00 a.m. Holy Eucharist; The First

Scrutiny at 10:00 a.m.; The Gospel of the  
Woman at the Well



**Saturday, March 21, 2020**

4:00 p.m. Vigil Eucharist

**Sunday, March 22, 2020**

8:00 a.m. and 10:00 a.m. Holy Eucharist;  
The Second Scrutiny at 10:00 a.m.; The  
Gospel of the Man Born Blind



**Saturday, March 28, 2020**

4:00 p.m. Vigil Eucharist

**Sunday, March 29, 2020**

8:00 a.m. and 10:00 a.m. Holy Eucharist;  
The Third Scrutiny at 10:00 a.m.; The  
Gospel of the Raising of Lazarus



***Palm Sunday and The Beginning of Holy Week***

**Saturday, April 4 2020**, 4:00 p.m.  
Vigil Eucharist; *Blessing of Palms, Procession, Liturgy of the Word, Reading of the Passion According to Matthew, and Holy Eucharist*

**Sunday, April 5, 2020**, 8:00 a.m. and **10:30 a.m.** Holy Eucharist; *Blessing of Palms, Procession Liturgy of the Word, Reading of the Passion According To Matthew, and Holy Eucharist*

**Monday, April 6, 2020**, Monday of Holy Week; Holy Eucharist, 8:00 a.m.

**Tuesday, April 7, 2020**, Tuesday of Holy Week; Liturgy of the Word and Holy Communion

**Wednesday, April 8, 2020**, Wednesday of Holy Week; Holy Eucharist, 8:00 a.m.

# Triduum



**Holy Thursday, April 9, 2020**  
8:00 a.m. Sung Morning Prayer

7:30 p.m. Evening Liturgy of the Last Supper Procession, *Liturgy of the Word, Washing of Feet, Holy Eucharist, Procession To The Altar of Repose, Adoration until 10:00 p.m.*

**Good Friday, April 10, 2020**  
8:00 a.m. - Sung Morning Prayer

12:00 Noon - Ecumenical Worship, "The Seven Last Words"

3:00 p.m. - The Commemoration of the Lord's Passion and Death, *Liturgy of the Word, The Passion According To St. John, Veneration of the Cross, Holy Communion*

7:30 p.m. – Tenebrae, *Liturgy of the Word and Veneration of the Cross*

**Holy Saturday, April 11, 2020**  
8:00 a.m. - Sung Morning Prayer

**7:30 p.m. The Great Vigil of Easter**  
*Lighting of the New Fire, Liturgy of the Word, The Sacraments of Initiation, and Holy Eucharist*

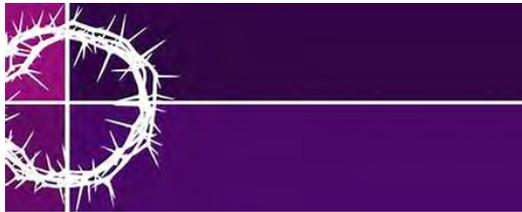


## **EASTER DAY – THE FEAST OF THE RESURRECTION**

**Sunday, April 12, 2020**

8:00 a.m. and **10:30 a.m.**

Festive Choral Eucharist Procession, *Liturgy of the Word, Renewal of Baptismal Promises and Sprinkling Rite, Holy Eucharist*



### **The Weekdays of Lent**

Monday – Wednesday – Friday

Holy Eucharist 8:00 a.m.

Tuesday – Thursday

Liturgy of the Word and Holy Communion - 8:00 a.m.



This year we will be having a simple soup and bread supper each of the Lenten Fridays at 6:30 p.m. A Free-will Offering will be received and all proceeds will be donated to our adopted parochial school of St. Peter Martyr, Pittsburg, as a part of our Lenten Almsgiving.

Following the supper, there will be a different Lenten service each week in the church at 7:30 p.m. The schedule is as follows:

Friday, February 28, 2020 - 6:30 p.m.  
Clam Chowder; 7:30 p.m. Stations of the Cross

Friday, March 6, 2020 - 6:30 p.m.  
Vegetable Soup; 7:30 p.m. Sung Evening Prayer

Friday, March 13, 2020 - 6:30 p.m.  
Cream of Potato; 7:30 p.m. Liturgy of the Word and the Sacrament of Anointing

Friday, March 20, 2020 - 6:30 p.m.  
Cream of Carrot; 7:30 p.m. Stations of the Cross

Friday, March 27, 2020 - 6:30 p.m.  
French Onion Soup; 7:30 p.m. Sung Evening Prayer

Friday, April 3, 2020 - 6:30 p.m.  
Clam Chowder; 7:30 p.m. Communal Penance/Sacrament of Reconciliation



One of the important directions we have taken as a parish this year is to do even more regarding the Works of Justice. How does this apply to the Season of Lent? With regard to the threefold discipline of Prayer, Fasting, and Almsgiving, we suggest the following:

**Prayer** – in place of “memorized” prayers, we invite you to pray for the trouble spots and painful places in the world, i.e. Iran, Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Africa, for the healing of our government and its leaders as well as those of all the countries of the world, for the healing of our Church as an institution.

**Fasting** – not so much from food as from any ways of thinking, speaking, or acting that are negative, hostile, judgmental, negatively critical, and remembering that we are totally dependent upon God. We can be at one with the hungry of the world for dignity, respect, for forgiveness, and for love.

**Almsgiving** – in addition to our financial support for Catholic Education through our adopted parochial school of St. Peter Martyr, Pittsburg, are almsgiving this Lent can challenge us to be less material, less of a consumer, and more united with the holy ones who dedicate their lives to the needs of others.

Additionally, Ash Wednesday is a Day of Fasting and Abstinence for all between the ages of 13 and 59, which means only one full meal and two lesser meals that do not constitute a full meal and refraining from eating meat or meat by-products. All the Fridays of Lent are Days of Abstinence, refraining from eating meat or meat by-products. Good Friday is also a Day of Fast and Abstinence for all those aged 13 to 59, only one full meal and no meat or meat by-products.



### ***The Easter Environment***

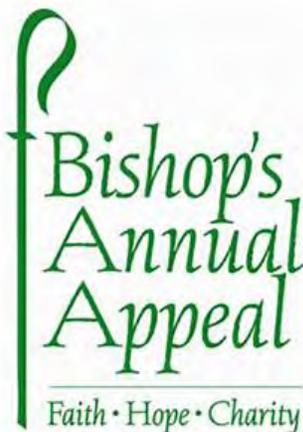
Each year, our Art & Environment Committee creates a magnificent environment for The Great Vigil of Easter, Easter Day, and the entire Easter Season. The living plants in all the glorious colors of spring, the panels of cloth that adorn our Icons, the art work, candles, and living trees all help us to celebrate the new life of the resurrection for the entire Easter Season of seven weeks. We invite you to help us make the environment possible by giving a donation either In Honor of or In Loving Memory of a loved one, family member, or friend. Your donations will be listed in the bulletins of the Easter Season with gratitude and thanksgiving for your thoughtfulness and generosity. Envelopes for your donations will be made available on the credenza as well as with my Easter Letter.



### ***About Liturgy: “Do the red, say the black” is a myth***

You may have heard some people claim that they “only do the red and just say the black” when it comes to the liturgy, meaning they follow every single rubric (written in red) and never deviate from any of the assigned proper texts (written in black), spoken or sung.

A friend of mine, who is a priest and a world-famous liturgist, teaches seminarians how to preside for the Eucharist. He told me that he cautions his students that no one ever follows *all* the liturgical rules *all* the time. It simply isn't possible. Even the most rubric-minded priest, liturgist, musician, or liturgical committee will make decisions that are "not in the book." They will also make choices (sometimes unknowingly) that are outside the liturgical norms because of their own preferences, the needs of the assembly, or because the immediate situation requires it. My friend admitted that he doesn't follow every single jot and tittle either because that isn't the point of liturgy. Liturgy is a dynamic relationship between God and God's people. To be true to that, we must go beyond the law to its spirit. Just as notes and words on a page do not become a song until they are sung, liturgy doesn't happen until rubrics and texts are joined to human tradition, need, and frailty and brought to life by those who are faithful to the spirit of the law that requires more of us than merely following rules.



The theme for this year's Bishop's Appeal is once again "Build My Church." Our goal is the same for last year: \$34,900. The Appeal serves various ministries within the diocese including retired priests, on-going clergy education, parishes and schools. I

introduced the Appeal to you last weekend at each liturgy in advance of each of our households receiving a letter from the diocese with details about the Appeal along with the contribution envelope.

**It is important that you return the envelope with your contribution to the parish so that our counting teams can keep track of all contributions to the diocese. Please do not mail the envelope back to the diocese, but rather place it in the Sunday offering along with your regular donations.**

I will give you a weekly accounting of our progress towards reaching the goal. As we have done each year, we not only reach the goal but we exceed it! And we do that by everyone of our families/individuals participating. In order for us to reach this year's goal, I am asking for a one-time contribution in the amount of \$50.00. I realize that some will give that exact amount, others will contribute less than the requested amount, and others will give more than the requested amount. Again, **what is critical to the success of our reaching the goal is that everyone participate.**

Let us all do our part to help further the various ministries of our diocese. As always, your generous participation is greatly appreciated.

# Bishop McElroy on voting with faith and a conscience

Feb 7, 2020

by [Bishop Robert McElroy](#)



San Diego Bishop Robert McElroy and other bishops from California, Hawaii and Nevada leave in procession after concelebrating Mass at the Basilica of St. Mary Major while making their "ad limina" visits in Rome Jan. 30. (CNS/Paul Haring)

**Editor's note:** San Diego Bishop Robert McElroy delivered the following talk Feb. 6 at the Harpst Center for Catholic Thought and Culture at the University of San Diego. Entitled, "Conscience, Candidates and Discipleship in Voting," McElroy's talk looks at the moral act of voting in original and incisive ways and lays the groundwork for development of "Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship," the U.S. bishops' quadrennial document on voting.

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis points powerfully to the vocation of faith-filled citizenship:

*An authentic faith ... always involves a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better than we found it. We love this magnificent planet on which God has put us, and we love the human*

*family which dwells here, with all of its tragedies and struggles, its hopes and aspirations, its strengths and weaknesses. The earth is our common home and all of us are brothers and sisters. If indeed 'the just ordering of society and of the state is a central responsibility of politics,' the Church 'cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice.'*

It is primarily through the votes of Catholic women and men, rooted in conscience and in faith that the Church enters into the just ordering of society and the state. And it is primarily in voting for specific candidates for office that believers as citizens have the greatest opportunity to leave the earth better than we found it.

Yet comparatively little attention has been paid in Catholic moral theology to the moral nature and structure of the act of voting for specific candidates. Much focus is placed on individual policy issues and their moral implications in Catholic social teaching. If the primary role of citizens were to vote on specific issues, this might be sufficient. But a vote for individual candidates inevitably encapsulates a wide range of policy options reaching out into the future, as well as varying capacities and intentions among the candidates. Where does Catholic theology begin in assisting believers to carry out their role of ennobling the world?

Pope Francis answers this question by proposing starkly that our political lives must be seen as an essential element of our personal call to holiness. This certainly means that our political actions must reflect and flow from our Catholic faith. But Francis is demanding much more. He proposes that we can only fulfill our vocation as faithful citizens if we come to see in the very toxicity of our political

culture at the current moment a call for deeper conversion to Jesus Christ. It is not enough for us to ignore the corrosive elements of political life in the United States, nor even to navigate our role as citizens and voters without succumbing to the tribalism that bisects our society. We are called in our lives as citizens and believers to be missionaries of dialogue and civility in a moment that values neither. And this requires deep spiritual reflection, courage and judgment. It demands a Christlike dedication to seeking the truth no matter where it may lie, and defining our politics and voting in the light of the Gospel.

### **Salient issues of Catholic social teaching**

In this task, the principles of Catholic social teaching as they are applied to the core political issues of American society today provide a rich and sacred source of guidance in weighing the policy proposals of competing candidates.

The comprehensiveness of Catholic social teaching points toward an understanding of justice, life and peace that refuses to be confined to narrow boxes or relegated to partisan categories. At the same time, this very comprehensiveness makes the prioritization of Catholic teachings difficult for voters. As the 2020 election cycle begins, at least ten salient goals emerge from the Gospel and the long tradition of Catholic faith:

- The promotion of a culture and legal structures that protect the life of unborn children.
- The reversal of the climate change that threatens the future of humanity and particularly devastates the poor and the marginalized.

- Policies that safeguard the rights of immigrants and refugees in a moment of great intolerance.
- Laws that protect the aged, the ill, and the disabled from the lure and the scourge of euthanasia and assisted suicide.
- Vigorous opposition to racism in every form, both through cultural transformation and legal structures.
- The provision of work and the protection of workers' rights across America.
- Systematic efforts to fight poverty and egregious inequalities of wealth.
- Policies that promote marriage and family, which are so essential for society.
- Substantial movement toward universal nuclear disarmament.
- The protection of religious liberty.

Frequently in discussions of the application of Catholic social teaching to voting, the question is raised whether one issue has a unique priority among all of the other issues in its claim upon believers in the current election cycle. Some have categorized abortion in that way. Others, climate change. This question deserves deeper scrutiny.

More than 750,000 unborn children are directly killed in the United States every year. At one time there was bipartisan support for erecting policies that made abortion rare. Now that commitment has been eviscerated in the Democratic Party in a capitulation to notions of privacy that simply block out the human identity and rights of unborn children. Even in an age when sonograms testify with the eloquence of truth and life itself that children in the

womb are genuinely our brothers and sisters, our daughters and sons, the annihilation of their humanity in perception and in fact continues. Catholic social teaching has consistently demanded that there be legal protections for the unborn, as they are the most vulnerable and victimized of humanity. But we are rapidly moving toward becoming a nation split in two: with half of our country moving toward laws safeguarding the unborn and the other half of our country adopting ever more extreme laws that allow the killing of children on the verge of birth. The passage of the New York abortion law this past year was a marker of America's repudiation of the most basic principles of human life. It is for all of these reasons that so many in the Church consider abortion to be the preeminent political imperative at stake in 2020.



Young women hold signs while participating in the Global Climate Strike in New York City Sept. 20, 2019. (CNS/Gregory A. Shemitz)

At the same time there is a clear international scientific consensus that climate change caused by the use of fossil fuels and other human activities poses an existential threat to the very future of humanity and that air pollution resulting from fossil fuels is already a major cause of

premature death on our planet. Existing trajectories of pollutants being placed in the atmosphere by human activity, if unchecked, will raise the temperature of the earth in the coming decades, generating catastrophic rises in human exposure to deadly heat, devastating rises in water levels and massive exposure to a series of perilous viruses. In addition, there will be severe widespread famines, draughts and massive dislocations of peoples that will cause untold deaths, human suffering and violent conflict. The devastating fires in Australia are a sign of what lies before us, and a testimony that, on so many levels, our current pollution of the earth is stealing the future from coming generations. Because the trajectory of danger unleashed by fossil fuels is increasing so rapidly, the next ten years are critical to staunching the threat to our planet. The United States, which was once a leader in this effort, has in the current Administration become the leader in resisting efforts to combat climate change and in denying its existence. As a consequence, the survival of the planet, which is the prerequisite for all human life, is at risk.

Against the backdrop of these two monumental threats to human life, how can one evaluate the competing claims that either abortion or climate change should be uniquely preeminent in Catholic social teaching regarding the formation of Americans as citizens and believers? Four points should be considered.

1. There is no mandate in universal Catholic social teaching that gives a categorical priority to either of these issues as uniquely determinative of the common good.
2. The death toll from abortion is more immediate, but the long-term death toll from

unchecked climate change is larger and threatens the very future of humanity.

3. Both abortion and the environment are core life issues in Catholic teaching.
4. The designation of either of these issues as the preeminent question in Catholic social teaching at this time in the United States will inevitably be hijacked by partisan forces to propose that Catholics have an overriding duty to vote for candidates that espouse that position. Recent electoral history shows this to be a certainty.

**Racial injustice is on the rise, buttressed by a new language and symbolism that seeks to advance the evil of white nationalism and create structures of racial prejudice for a new generation.**

The question of preeminence is further clouded by a third compelling issue our country faces in this election cycle — the culture of exclusion that has grown so dramatically in our nation during the last three years. Racial injustice is on the rise, buttressed by a new language and symbolism that seeks to advance the evil of white nationalism and create structures of racial prejudice for a new generation.

Immigrants and refugees, who have been at the core of America's history as a source of vitality and richness, are portrayed as a cause for fear and suspicion in our society rather than of solidarity. Members of the Muslim community are widely characterized as aliens whose religion automatically

means they cannot be trusted, while incidents of vile and pervasive anti-Semitism are on the rise.

This growing culture of exclusion does not emerge as a specific policy question in our contemporary national politics; rather, it seeps into all of the most salient questions of life and dignity that our society faces and corrodes each one in turn.

The culture of exclusion has unleashed a poison of animosity against immigrants that paralyzes our politics so deeply that we cannot even find a pathway to protect young men and women who came to this nation as children and now thirst to be citizens of the only land they have ever known. The deadly imprint of racist structures and legacies on our criminal justice system magnifies fears and resentments among African American and Hispanic families and further imperils the men and women who give their lives to law enforcement. Racial and ethnic disparities in education, health, job availability and housing which are rooted in our nation's historic culture of exclusion dramatically propel the breakdown of marriage and family life. And inequalities of wealth and income make it all but impossible to overcome the enduring challenges of work and poverty in our nation.

On virtually every question of human life and dignity the growing culture of exclusion in our nation reinforces and propels cleavages that are highly destructive to all of the goals that lie at the center of Catholic social teaching. For this reason, many faith-filled Catholics believe that in this election cycle the most compelling issue that arises from Catholic social teaching for American voters is the need to repudiate radically this culture of exclusion before it spreads further

and leads to new levels of moral paralysis and division.

Seen against this background of abortion, climate change and the culture of exclusion, it is clear that the faith-filled voter who seeks to be guided by Catholic social teaching is confronted by compelling moral claims that cut across the partisan and cultural divides of our nation. The pathway from these cross-cutting moral claims to decisions on particular candidates is not a direct and singular one in Catholic teaching, rooted in one issue. For this reason, the drive to label a single issue preeminent distorts the call to authentic discipleship in voting rather than advancing it.



Pro-life advocates stand outside the U.S. Supreme Court in Washington Jan. 22, the anniversary of the 1973 U.S. Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion across the nation. (CNS/Reuters/Sarah Silbiger)

### **Opportunity, competence and character**

In America today a faith-filled voter is called to approach voting from a stance of bridge-building and healing for our nation. Such a voter is also called to integrate into his voting decisions the major salient elements of Catholic teaching that touch upon the political issues of our day, understanding that these teachings vary in priority and claim, but are united in their orientation to the common good.

But voting for candidates ultimately involves choosing a *candidate* for public office, not a stance, nor a specific teaching of the Church. And for this reason, faithful voting involves careful consideration of the specific ability of a particular candidate to actually advance the common good. In making this assessment, opportunity, competence and character all come into play.

The question of opportunity is pivotal in voting discipleship. What are the elements of human life and dignity that a specific candidate will actually be able to advance given the scope of the office she is seeking, the crucial issues that are likely to face her during her term, and the policy positions she embraces? What coalitions will she be likely to join and advance? In short, what capacity will she have, in the specific political context she will face, to transform law and public policy in key sectors in order to promote the common good?

Competence is also a central metric for faith-filled voters to consider. It does little good to elect a saint who echoes Catholic social teaching on every issue if that candidate does not have the competence to carry out his duties effectively and thereby enhance the common good. Faith-filled voters must assess the intelligence, human relations skills, mastery of policy and intuitive insights that each candidate brings to bear, for voting discipleship seeks results, not merely aspirations.

Finally, because our nation is in a moment of political division and degradation in its public life, character represents a particularly compelling criterion for faithful voting in 2020. In the United States, political leaders, especially at the highest levels, imprint their character in pivotal ways upon the entire political culture, and

thus on society itself. Today, leaders in government embrace corrosive tactics and language, fostering division rather than unity. The notion of truth itself has lost its footing in our public debate. Collegiality has been discarded. Principles are merely justifications for partisan actions, to be abandoned when those principles no longer favor a partisan advantage. There is a fundamental lack of political courage in the land.

## In the end, it is the candidate who is on the ballot, not a specific issue.

For all these reasons, character is an even more essential element in effective faith-filled voting at the present moment, and another reason why faith-filled voting cannot be simply reduced to a series of competing social justice teachings.

In the end, it is the candidate who is on the ballot, not a specific issue. The faith-filled voter is asked to make the complex judgment: which candidate will be likely to best advance the common good through his office in the particular political context he will face? Such a decision embraces the planes of principle and character, competence and capacity. And for the faithful voter, the very complexity of this moral judgment demands a recourse to the voice of God which lies deep within each of us — our conscience.

### **Conscience and prudence**

For the disciple of Jesus Christ, voting is a sacred action. In the words of *The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, it touches "the crossroads where Christian life and conscience come into contact with the real world." For this reason, it cannot be reduced to a logical set of

propositions that yield a predetermined result in the selection of candidates.

Some theologians have sought to find such a logic of deduction in the concept of intrinsic evil. Catholic theology holds that some actions, such as abortion or research on human embryos, are intrinsically evil; that is they are always and everywhere wrong. Because of this some Catholic leaders have asserted that candidates who seek laws opposing intrinsically evil actions automatically have a primary claim to political support in the Catholic conscience.



Pope Francis greets San Diego Bishop Robert McElroy during a meeting with bishops from California, Hawaii and Nevada on their "ad limina" visits to the Vatican Jan. 27. (CNS/Vatican Media)

The problem with this approach is that while the criterion of intrinsic evil identifies specific human acts that can never be justified, this criterion is not a measure of the relative gravity of the evil in particular human or political actions. Telling a lie is intrinsically evil, while escalating a nuclear arms race is not. But it is wrongheaded to propose that telling a lie to constituents should count more in the calculus of faithful voting than a candidate's plans to initiate a destabilizing nuclear weapons program. Similarly, contraception is intrinsically evil in Catholic moral theology, while actions which destroy the environment generally are

not. But it is a far greater moral evil for our country to abandon the Paris Climate Accord than to provide contraceptives in federal health centers. What these examples point out is that Catholic social teaching cannot be reduced to a deductivist model when it comes to voting to safeguard the life and dignity of the human person.

How, then does the faith-filled voter choose candidates in a way that integrates the tenets of Catholic social teaching, recognizes the role that competence, character and capacity play in the real world of governing, and preserves a stance of building unity within society?

The Church locates this pathway in the virtue of prudence. In the words of *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, "prudence is the virtue that disposes practical reason to discern our true good in every circumstance and to choose the right means of achieving it. . . . It is prudence that immediately guides the judgment of conscience." In Catholic social teaching, prudence is called "the charioteer of the virtues"; it brings into balance all of the virtues of the Christian moral life to provide a singularly incisive moral perspective for the disciple confronting ethically complex problems. It is at the heart of the workings of conscience.

**Prudential judgment is not  
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It is the primary mode.**

Some Catholic commentators on voting have in recent years portrayed prudential judgment as having a deficient dignity and grasp of the truth. They say that there is a

categorical claim to support candidates who legislatively oppose intrinsic evils, but only a secondary claim for candidates whose proposals rest on prudential judgment for their moral discernment.

To say this is to miss the central element of Catholic teaching about conscience and prudence. As the Catechism notes, "With the help (prudence), we apply moral principles to particular cases without error and overcome doubts about the good to achieve and the evil to be avoided."

Prudential judgment is not a secondary or deficient mode of discernment in the Christian conscience. It is the primary mode. This is certainly true in voting for candidates for public office. The constellation of substantial moral elements that are relevant to deciding which candidate is most likely to advance the common good during her time in office can only be morally comprehended through the virtue of prudence. There cannot be faith-filled Catholic voting without the virtue of prudence, exercised within the sanctity of well-formed conscience.

In the closing remarks of his address to Congress in 2015, Pope Francis said a nation is great when it defends liberty as Abraham Lincoln did, when it seeks equality as Martin Luther King did, and when it strives for justice for the oppressed as Dorothy Day did. Let us pray that our nation moves toward such greatness in this election year, and that faith-filled prudent disciples are leading the way.

