

FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP
HOMILY NOTES
THIRTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
26 October 2008
“Our Commitment to Faithful Citizenship”

First Reading: Exodus 22:20-26

vs. 20: “You shall not molest or oppress an alien, for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt.”

vs. 26: “If he cries out to me, I will hear him; for I am compassionate.”

The United States of America was founded by foreigners; we are descendents of immigrants. In today’s first reading, God reminds his people that they were once foreigners, and gives them the command to care for those who find themselves without home as they once were. We have an obligation to care for the needs of the most vulnerable members of our society: the unborn, the poor, the unemployed, the homeless, and the immigrant. They need us to speak on their behalf.

- *“We are one human family, whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. We are our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers, wherever they may be. Loving our neighbor has global dimensions and requires us to eradicate racism and address the extreme poverty and disease plaguing so much of the world. Solidarity also includes the Scriptural call to welcome the stranger among us—including immigrants seeking work, a safe home, education for their children, and a decent life for their families. In light of the Gospel’s invitation to be peacemakers, our commitment to solidarity with our neighbors—at home and abroad—also demands that we promote peace and pursue justice in a world marred by terrible violence and conflict. Decisions on the use of force should be guided by traditional moral criteria and undertaken only as a last resort. As Pope Paul VI taught: ‘If you want peace, work for justice’ (World Day of Peace Message, January 1, 1972)” (Faithful Citizenship¹, 53)*

Responsorial Psalm 18:2-4, 47, 51

vs. 2: “I love you, O Lord, my strength, O Lord, my rock, my fortress, my deliverer.”

God is the foundation for our lives – we owe him everything that we are and that we have. We are reminded that all is gift and thus we return it to him by being generous towards those in need.

¹ “Faithful Citizenship” refers to the document *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States* (14 November 2007) and can be read online at www.usccb.org/faithfulcitizenship/FCStatement.pdf.

- *“Catholic voters should use the framework of Catholic teaching to examine candidates’ positions on issues affecting human life and dignity as well as issues of justice and peace, and they should consider candidates’ integrity, philosophy, and performance. It is important for all citizens to see beyond party politics, to analyze campaign rhetoric critically, and to choose their political leaders according to principle, not party affiliation or mere self-interest’ (Living the Gospel of Life, no. 33)” (Faithful Citizenship, 41).*

Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 1:5c-10

vs. 6: “And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, receiving the word in great affliction, with joy from the Holy Spirit, so that you became a model for all believers in Macedonia and Achaia.”

Paul encouraged the believers of Thessalonica to follow his example and that of Christ in their everyday lives, and in so doing become models to all those around them. We too are called to be model Catholics and model citizens, and in this way we “serve the living God” (vs. 10). This is achieved in two ways: 1) by actively engaging in the voting process and 2) praying for all of the candidates and their respective political parties. St. Paul tells us that we must pray for our civil authorities: “First of all, then, I ask that supplications, prayers, petitions, and thanksgivings be offered for everyone, for kings and for all in authority, that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all devotion and dignity. This is good and pleasing to God our Savior, who wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:1-4).

- *“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. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us, ‘It is necessary that all participate, each according to his position and role, in promoting the common good. This obligation is inherent in the dignity of the human person. . . . As far as possible citizens should take an active part in public life’ (nos. 1913-1915)” (Faithful Citizenship, 13).*
- *“These themes from Catholic social teaching provide a moral framework that does not easily fit ideologies of ‘right’ or ‘left,’ ‘liberal’ or ‘conservative,’ or the platform of any political party. They are not partisan or sectarian, but reflect fundamental ethical principles that are common to all people” (Faithful Citizenship, 55).*

Gospel: Matthew 22:34-40

vv. 37-40: “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.”

Jesus gives us the revolutionary New Law, the Law of Love. He sums up the law and the prophets by the command to love God above all things and to love our neighbor as ourselves. “And who *is* my neighbor,” we might ask. The parable of the Good Samaritan gives the answer. He cares for the man in need though he was of a different nationality, culture, and religion. Our neighbors are all around us and Christ calls us to reach out to them, to defend their basic right to life and their rights to what is need for a decent life. How often do we say: “That doesn’t concern me” or “That is not my problem”? Jesus reminds us of the “golden rule”: treat others the way we desire to be treated. We must not turn our back on those in need.

- *“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” (Faithful Citizenship, 28).*
- *“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. All the life issues are connected, for erosion of respect for the life of any individual or group in society necessarily diminishes respect for all life. The moral imperative to respond to the needs of our neighbors—basic needs such as food, shelter, health care, education, and meaningful work—is universally binding on our consciences and may be legitimately fulfilled by a variety of means. Catholics must seek the best ways to respond to these needs. As Blessed Pope John XXIII taught, ‘[Each of us] has the right to life, to bodily integrity, and to the means which are suitable for the proper development of life; these are primarily food, clothing, shelter, rest, medical care, and, finally, the necessary social services’ (Pacem in Terris, no. 11)” (Faithful Citizenship, 25).*

Context:

With the election only two weeks away, the bishops of our nation remind the Catholic faithful of their moral obligation to vote responsibly as citizens whose faith informs their decisions.

- *“The Church is principled but not ideological. We cannot compromise basic principles or moral teaching. We are committed to clarity about our moral teaching and to civility. In public life, it is important to practice the virtues of justice and charity that are at the core of our Tradition. We should work with others in a variety of ways to advance our moral principles.
In light of these principles and the blessings we share as part of a free and democratic nation, we bishops vigorously repeat our call for a renewed kind of politics:*
 - *Focused more on moral principles than on the latest polls*
 - *Focused more on the needs of the weak than on benefits for the strong*
 - *Focused more on the pursuit of the common good than on the demands of narrow interests**This kind of political participation reflects the social teaching of our Church and the best traditions of our nation” (Faithful Citizenship, 60-62).*

