

CONSCIENCE AND THE CATHOLIC VOTER – 6TH OF 8

“In the Catholic tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation.”

- *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, 13

Since participation in political life is a moral obligation, Catholics need to form their conscience with the mind and heart of the Church on issues of consequence. This outline is the sixth of eight, which will examine important moral and political issues. This sixth outline will provide an overview of the issue of racism.

Racism

In their November 2018 Pastoral Letter Against Racism, *Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love*, the U.S. Catholic bishops wrote, “Racism occurs because a person ignores the fundamental truth that ... all [humans are] equally made in the image of God.” (p.4) Racism fails to acknowledge the dignity with which God creates each person, and it contributes to a culture of death.

Since the Civil Rights Movement in our nation, the country has moved forward in many positive ways past racial discrimination. Nevertheless, the nation still has a long way to go to reach reconciliation on race, as evident by the nightly news. Thus, it is imperative that especially as members of the body of Christ, we seek to reach out and listen to those whose race and ethnicity is different from our own to create a culture of communication, which may then lead to a culture of communion. As the USSCB states:

We cannot, therefore, look upon the progress against racism in recent decades and conclude that our current situation meets the standard of justice. In fact, God demands what is right and just. As Christians, we are called to listen and know the stories of our brothers and sisters. We must create opportunities to hear, with open hearts, the tragic stories that are deeply imprinted on the lives of our brothers and sisters, if we are to be moved with empathy to promote justice. Many groups, such as the Irish, Italians, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Poles, Jews, Chinese, and Japanese, can attest to having been the target of racial and ethnic prejudice in this country. It is also true that many groups are still experiencing prejudice, including rising anti-Semitism, the discrimination many Hispanics face today, and anti-Muslim sentiment. Especially instructive at this moment, however, are the historical and contemporary experiences of Native and African Americans. (Open Wide Our Hearts, p.10)

It is therefore incumbent upon Catholic Christians to reach outside of our comfort zones to communities different from our own to help rebuild a fractured human family. For while we may not be hurting from the scars of racism, members of our Church and the human family are. Racism ultimately then is an attack on human life and the human family, thus we are called to respond forcefully to it because of its broad range of effects into other areas which effect the dignity of the human person. As the USSCB has written:

The injustice and harm racism causes are an attack on human life. The Church in the United States has spoken out consistently and forcefully against abortion, assisted suicide, euthanasia, the death penalty, and other forms of violence that threaten human life. It is not a secret that these attacks on human life have severely affected people of color, who are disproportionately affected by poverty, targeted for abortion, have less access to healthcare, have the greatest numbers on death row, and are most likely to feel pressure to end their lives when facing serious illness. (Open Wide Our Hearts, p.30)

In summation, racism is an issue that still exists in our society. As Catholic faithful, we must lead the way in how we speak, act and love each member of our human family. Correspondingly, we should desire candidates that uphold the dignity of every human person, no matter their race or ethnicity.

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