

## **See the Bloodshed, Hark the Outcry!<sup>1</sup>**

The Prophet Isaiah and our Lord Jesus Christ speak of good vineyards that go bad. They don't go bad on their own, but by the mismanagement and bad intentions of the people running them. The vineyard is a symbol for Israel, a nation established by God to be holy and produce good fruit. But instead they turned aside from God, following false gods and not following God's moral law and commandments. No matter how often the Prophets spoke out on the issues of the day, the people not only didn't listen but actively resisted and persecuted them. The prophets spoke on His behalf and warned them of the consequences of turning away from the Lord.

In our day, the Church speaks out with the voice of Christ calling those who identify with Him to think with one mind, love with one heart, and act with one body, the Body of Christ.<sup>2</sup> This, unfortunately, is not the current condition of the Church. Although diversity is a good thing and there are a variety of issues about which reasonable people can disagree, there are laws that cannot be broken that all Catholics are bound to follow personally, defend publicly, and promote socially.

This weekend is Respect Life Sunday in the Catholic Church in the United States. The first Sunday of October has been so designated for many decades, and the month of October is pro-life month as well as the month of Mary, the Mother of God. The timing of this may or may not be coincidental, but today is a good day to remember what we Catholics believe and the priority that is given to certain moral issues.

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Church has had to reaffirm the priority of Her teachings against abortion, euthanasia, sexual morality and sexual identity, and freedom of religion. And not just in the US but around the world: many people accept a standard of

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<sup>1</sup> *Is* 5:7.

<sup>2</sup> See *Phil* 2:2.

behavior that is contrary to the teachings of the Church, and sadly this includes many Catholics. For us, these are not primarily political issues: they are moral issues that have become hot-button topics in politics. We must approach our moral priorities as Catholics first, then weigh them against what all the talking heads in politics and the media are saying.

Please understand: I am not endorsing anyone or referring to any party platform. You can draw your own conclusions on how our Catholic Faith lines up with your politics.

“For generations it has been the determination of the Catholic Church not to endorse political candidates or parties. This approach was initiated by Archbishop John Carroll – the very first Catholic Bishop serving in the United States. It was long before there was an IRS code, and had nothing to do with a desire to preserve tax-exempt status. Rather [we] realized early on that [we] must not tether the credibility of the Church to the uncertain future actions or statements of a particular politician or party.”<sup>3</sup>

We learned this lesson the hard way: how many times over 2000 years has the Church sided with one royal family, or cozied up to a regime, or for self-preservation went along with a government uprising and lost its way?

We Catholics should not feel at home in any political party. But we often identify ourselves so closely with one that we cannot or refuse to hear our Church speaking above it. “We should be guided more by our moral convictions than by our attachment to a political party or interest group.”<sup>4</sup>

In drawing your own conclusions, some may feel that what I’m saying or what the US Bishops have written is a tacit approval for a

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<sup>3</sup> Pastoral Letter of Archbishop Joseph Naumann of Kansas City and Bishop Robert Finn of Kansas City-St. Joseph (Missouri), 2008.

<sup>4</sup> *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States (FCFC)* n. 14.

candidate. I realize this can cause anger or a response quoting a misused concept of “separation of church and state,”<sup>5</sup> but listen:

political “participation should help *transform* the party to which we belong; we should not let the party transform *us* in such a way that we neglect or deny fundamental moral truths or approve intrinsically evil acts. We are called to bring together our principles and our politics.”<sup>6</sup>

Besides, separating church and state does not mean separating faith and political issues: that is precisely where they must overlap.

Recently the US Bishops reaffirmed that “the threat of abortion remains our preeminent priority because it directly attacks life itself, because it takes place within the sanctuary of the family, and because of the number of lives destroyed.”<sup>7</sup> What’s worse, now people advocate to allow a child already born to die from neglect: “post-birth abortion” is infanticide and another form of murder. While we are reminded not to “dismiss other serious threats to life and dignity such as racism, the environment, or poverty, the priority is upholding and defending our most basic right – to live.”<sup>8</sup> “All issues do not carry the same moral weight,”<sup>9</sup> and it is also true that “as Catholics we are not single-issue voters.”<sup>10</sup> The Church promotes a broad spectrum of issues such as poverty, racism, immigration, employment, health care, private property, slavery, hunger, violence, war, death penalty, the environment... But with our hierarchy of values we must remember that “the common outcry made on behalf of human rights – for example the right to health, to home, to family, to culture – is false and illusory of the right to life is not defended.”<sup>11</sup> In other words, if you don’t have the

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<sup>5</sup> See *FCFC*, n. 11.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> “Priorities at the Polls,” Bishop Joseph Naumann, USCCB Committee of Pro-Life Activities, *FCFC* n. 22 & Introductory Letter, p. 6, Washington D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Naumann, *op.cit.*

<sup>9</sup> *FCFC*, n. 37.

<sup>10</sup> *FCFC*, n. 42.

<sup>11</sup> St. Pope John Paul II, *Christifidelis Laici*, 1988, n. 38.

right to life you don't have the right to peace, to emigrate, to health care, to a just wage, etc.

“Being right in such [social] matters [such as capital punishment, immigration, or health care] can never excuse a wrong choice regarding the direct attack on human life. Indeed, the failure to protect and defend life in its most vulnerable stages renders suspect any claims to the ‘rightness’ of positions” that are not our highest priorities.<sup>12</sup>

“Abortion is an intrinsic evil, meaning that it is never permitted or morally justified, regardless of individual circumstances or intentions... Catholics are called to defend human life wherever it is threatened and stand up for human dignity wherever it is violated. The enormous number of human lives destroyed by abortion is one factor that elevates its importance. The most recent available data indicates over 2,000 children per day die from abortion in the United States. Since abortion was legalized in 1973, over 61 million children have been killed – and untold numbers of women and men suffer the aftermath.”<sup>13</sup>

“Abortion and euthanasia [the killing of the sick, the disabled, and the elderly] are the ‘preeminent threats to human dignity because they directly attack life itself, the most fundamental human good and the condition for all other goods.’<sup>14</sup> It is a mistake with grave moral consequences [in other words, a mortal sin] to treat the destruction of human life merely as a matter of choice. A legal system that violates the basic right to life on the grounds of choice is fundamentally flawed.”<sup>15</sup> “Those who knowingly, willingly, and directly support public policies or legislation that undermine fundamental moral principles cooperate with evil.”<sup>16</sup> In other words, if you support a person or law precisely because it's contrary to the

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<sup>12</sup> USCCB, *Living the Gospel of Life*, 1988, n. 22.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Living the Gospel of Life*, n. 5.

<sup>15</sup> *FCFC*, n. 22.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 31.

teachings of the Church, it's time to ask yourself if being a Catholic is important.

In our readings today, the vineyard workers – the nation – become corrupt and are punished. Jesus proposes that the owner of the vineyard, God Himself, will replace the bad stewards and give the vineyard “to a people that will produce its fruit.” This, friends, must be us. We’ve lived too long under unjust laws; our nation is stained with the blood of the innocent. Our faith requires of us a response to heal our nation, to have a “deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better than we found it.”<sup>17</sup>

These are crazy times, between the pandemic and the social upheaval in an election year almost everyone is tense and quick to anger. So I close with St. Paul’s exhortation in the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading:<sup>18</sup>

Have no anxiety at all, but in everything,  
by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving,  
make your requests known to God.  
Whatever is true, honorable, just, pure,  
lovely, gracious, excellent and praiseworthy:  
think about these things.  
Keep on doing what you have learned and received.  
Then the God of peace will be with you.

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<sup>17</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 183, in *FCFC*, n. 1.

<sup>18</sup> *Phil* 4:6-9.