

30th

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If you were here last week, you will remember the stories of King Cyrus and the Emperor Tiberius Caesar--and of the tremendous power of civic officials, either for good (King Cyrus), or for evil (Tiberius Caesar). In the US, of course, we can participate in who our leaders will be. So--even though many of us will be voting absentee--imagine yourself next Tuesday driving to your polling place. You get out the car an American; and perhaps you think of yourself as an independent, or as a member of a political party. You also walk into the voting booth as a Catholic. You might even remember Jesus' commandment to "love your neighbor as yourself." Not very specific. What does that mean on November 4?

You know by know that the Catholic church does not endorse any political party or candidate. There are good reasons for that. As pastor, I am strictly forbidden to endorse any political party or "take any action that could be construed as endorsement on the part of the Church." Instead, Catholics are expected to get educated on the "moral implications of political issues," to reflect, to pray--and then to vote according to their informed conscience.

So, what are some moral implications we Catholics are expected to have in mind as wait in line at the polling place? Imagine if you will, a giant slalom run in the Olympics: We're going to start at the top for momentum, go very fast, make lots of turns, and make a mad dash for the goal.

In November 2007, the American bishops by a vote of 221-4,

approved a document called "Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship." Lots of our slalom run comes from that document. Not a word of these remarks is simply my own opinion. My personal opinion doesn't matter.

At the top of the slalom, the pushoff, is the value and dignity of the human person, made in the image of God and a gift from God. We are stewards of human life. "Love your neighbor as yourself" because every neighbor is from God and made in God's image.

Let's start down the hillside: We don't do euthanasia: we don't kill people because they are suffering or no longer productive or a burden. We don't help people to kill themselves.

The Church opposes capital punishment. The life of even the worst murderer doesn't belong to us; it belongs to God. In the Gospel of Life, Pope John Paul wrote that capital punishment can be permitted only when the criminal cannot be securely imprisoned.

People have a right to enough to eat. They have a right to somewhere to live. People ought to have a chance to get work to feed themselves and their families. Human beings deserve to have some kind of health care, and they ought to have a chance to go to a school. Simply because they are human beings.

Some human beings, of course, have dark skin and speak Spanish; this does not make them less human. Countries have a right to control their borders, but everyone in their country, no matter their legal status, are still persons with a God-given dignity. The first reading reminded the Israelites that they themselves were once

aliens.

To respect human life means to not poison the environment, from which all our lives come.

More Catholic teaching: since human life is a gift from God, war should be a last resort; war should be taken after every other possible solution has been exhausted. The Catholic "just war" tradition has no room for a pre-emptive war. You may be aware that Pope John Paul II strongly admonished our President not to go to war in Iraq.

Since human life is a gift from God, people deserve to be born alive. To quote the bishops, "Abortion, the direct killing of a human being before birth, is never morally acceptable." The bishops add that "abortion and euthanasia...directly attack life itself, the most fundamental good and the condition for all others." (p. 17) "Love your neighbor as yourself."

For the same reason, the Church stands against embryonic stem cell research.

Finally, Catholicism teaches responsible sexual behavior, in marriage, and open to the gift of life.

That's a lot. Some issues are more important than others, for example, the right to be born. But the bishops teach that the other issues "are not optional concerns which can be dismissed." #29. The bishops teach that "the moral obligation to oppose intrinsically evil acts has a special claim on our consciences," AND that a Catholic may vote for a candidate who holds an objectionable position, even

an intrinsic evil, not to support that position, but for “truly grave moral reasons.” #35, #37.

Love God with your whole heart and soul and mind and strength and your neighbor as yourself--on November 4 and every day.