

CONSCIENCE AND THE CATHOLIC VOTER – 5TH 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 fifth of eight, which will examine important moral and political issues. This fifth outline will provide an overview of the issue of immigration.

Immigration

The first principle of Catholic Social Teaching is the dignity of the human person. From the moment of conception, each person is made in the image and likeness of God. This principle teaches us then that every immigrant, documented or undocumented, is made in God’s image and deserves our love and respect as a child of God.

As the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has written:

The Church supports the human rights of all people and offers them pastoral care, education, and social services, no matter what the circumstances of entry into this country, and it works for the respect of the human dignity of all especially those who find themselves in desperate circumstances. (Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity, A Statement of the U.S. Catholic Bishops, 2000)

Thus our starting point in discussing the immigration issue is one of mutual respect and the recognition of the dignity of our fellow man, especially the immigrant among us. One who has traveled to Latin American countries in particular can understand some of the desperate circumstances which drive migrants to our border seeking a better life.

Of course, the Church recognizes that a sovereign nation has a right and a responsibility to protect its own borders. As Pope Francis has stated:

Can borders be controlled? Yes, each country has a right to control its borders, who enters and who leaves, and countries that are in danger—of terrorism or the like—have more right to control them more . . . (Pope Francis, Interview with the Spanish newspaper El País on January 22, 2017)

The sovereignty of nations is consistent thought in Catholic Social Teaching as is further explained in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 2241:

Political authorities, for the sake of the common good for which they are responsible, may make the exercise of the right to immigrate subject to various juridical conditions, especially with regard to the immigrants’ duties toward their country of adoption. Immigrants are obliged to respect with gratitude the material and spiritual heritage of the country that receives them, to obey its laws, and to assist in carrying civic burdens.

In summation, Catholics approaching the immigration issue must maintain a balance between caring for the dignity of every human person, be they documented or undocumented in our nation, while appreciating the necessity of each nation state to regulate its borders for the common good. Given the prosperity in the United States of America, it is also important for our nation to strive to seek to help, as best as we are able, those seeking a better life:

The more prosperous nations are obliged, to the extent they are able, to welcome the foreigner in search of the security and the means of livelihood which he cannot find in his country of origin. (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2241)

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