



A MESSAGE FROM BISHOP WILLIAM E. KOENIG REGARDING THE 2024 ELECTION

September 10, 2024

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Over the next two months, government leaders and ballot initiatives will be voted on. While casting one's vote is rightly viewed as a civic responsibility, it is also something much more: it is a way that we will be living our faith. Please permit me to explain.

Salt of the Earth

Immediately after proclaiming the Beatitudes in His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus, in St. Matthew's Gospel, tells us that we are called to be the "salt of the earth." The image of being the "salt of the earth" is particularly relevant in regard to how we are called to live our vocations as citizens of an earthly nation and disciples of Christ. Salt in ancient days was used extensively to preserve the freshness of food. There was, of course, no means of refrigeration and keeping food from spoiling in the heat of the Middle East would have been hopeless if not for salt. In an analogous way, Jesus, whose death and resurrection has brought the dawn of a new day and enables us to be sons and daughters of God our Father, is aware of how the Godly values that he had just enumerated in the Beatitudes are constantly threatened by the opposition presented by worldly and material values. In calling us to be "salt of the earth," Jesus is telling us that we are to actively live our faith and values and in doing so change the world around us. Most often we associate "living our faith" with the ways we interact on a daily basis with those around us: by the words we speak, by the help we render, by the time we give to others. And that is all valid. Living our faith and being the salt of the earth, however, is not limited to those human interactions. We also live our faith by the ways that we cast our vote not only as citizens of a nation but more importantly as disciples of Jesus Christ who has revealed to us the values by which we strive to live and as salt of the earth strive to bear on the world.

Discerning God's Will

As we look ahead to voting our values, I am very aware of all the voices that are out there: television and radio commercials, print ads and social media postings, talk show hosts and podcasters. In the midst of them, however, I especially call your attention to the need to listen to the voice of God. Traditionally referred to as our conscience, it is our "most secret core, and...sanctuary [where we] are alone with God whose voice echoes in [our] depth...[And it is through our conscience that we] are joined to other[s] in the search for truth and for the right solution to so many moral problems which arise both in the life of individuals and from social relationships" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 16). While there are some who see the conscience as simply "doing whatever I feel," it is something much greater than a feeling and requires something much greater. If you've ever "wrestled with your conscience," you have a sense of this. And so,

what goes into making a “conscience decision”? We need to seek the truth that God has revealed through Sacred Scripture and the teaching of the Church as handed down over the ages from God through the power of the Holy Spirit. We need to examine the facts and information regarding the issues and candidates. We need to open ourselves up to God, tune out all the voices that during an election season can become an echo chamber and through our prayerful reflection discern the will of God.

Forming Our Conscience

In computer science, the acronym GIGO stands for “garbage in garbage out.” It refers to how the quality of a computer’s output will be largely contingent upon what was put in. In a similar vein, our ability to discern God’s voice is contingent upon how well we have allowed the truth and beauty of our faith to enter ourselves. To assist you in this regard, I especially encourage you to read and reflect upon a resource from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* [[forming-consciences-for-faithful-citizenship.pdf \(usccb.org\)](http://www.usccb.org/forming-consciences-for-faithful-citizenship.pdf)]. It highlights four principles of Catholic social teaching and applies Catholic teaching to the major issues of the day. Of these issues, abortion is the “pre-eminent priority because it directly attacks our most vulnerable and voiceless brothers and sisters.” Other issues that we are also called to consider in casting our ballot include: “euthanasia, gun violence, terrorism, the death penalty, and human trafficking....the redefinition of marriage and gender, threats to religious freedom at home and abroad, lack of justice for the poor, the suffering of migrants and refugees, wars and famines around the world, racism, the need for greater access to healthcare and education, care for our common home, and more.” May this resource assist us in the formation of our conscience and prepare us to vote our Christian values.

A Final Thought

Because my vote is only one of the many that will be cast in the coming days, we can at times feel that my vote is insignificant. History tells us, however, that this is not true. The national election of George W. Bush as president in 2000 was decided by one electoral college vote. And a key factor in getting to this level of electoral college votes was his winning by only 537 votes the State of Florida. Let us also not discount how important state and local races are in determining the future direction of our communities and the values by which we will be governed. In the words of Pope Francis, “Sometimes we hear: a good Catholic is not interested in politics. This is not true: good Catholics immerse themselves in politics by offering the best of themselves so that the leader can govern” (9/16/2013). Let us vote. And let us vote our values.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "William E. Koenig". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Most Reverend William E. Koenig, D.D.
Bishop of Wilmington