

Homily Outline for the 29th Sunday of the Year - Cycle A

Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Our Gospel passage today (Mt 22:15-21) begins a series of controversies between Jesus and the Pharisees who seek to “entrap” Him through lose/lose questions. They pose to Jesus a controversial question that was highly debated among the Jewish people of that time: should one pay the poll tax to the Roman government? The Pharisees opposed it, but the supporters of Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee, accepted it. This story focuses on how Jesus escapes his opponents’ deadly trap. It is not a political statement about paying taxes or promoting a separation between Church and state.

If Jesus says yes, then they will claim He is not a faithful Jew. If He says no, then He is advocating breaking the laws of the Roman empire. Either answer will draw criticism from at least some of His listeners.

Jesus immediately senses the malice of His opponents. Because He knows this is a test, He refers to his opponents as hypocrites. He asks the Pharisees for a Roman coin. A faithful Jew would not carry such a coin, but His opponents have one. He refers to the image on the coin that in Latin said, "Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus, great high priest." The opponents can easily identify the image. Technically, that Roman coin was the property of the emperor. Jesus very cleverly tells his opponents "to repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God." Only the official coin belongs to Caesar. However, Jewish creation theology taught that everything belonged to God. Jesus denies Caesar any claim to divinity. That is reserved to God alone. But Caesar can have back his one coin, for it already belongs to him.

"Repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God." This command of Our Lord has profound implications. On the one hand, Jesus affirms the duty in general to obey civil authority. This principle will be followed by the Christian community as we read in the *First Letter of Peter*: "Be subject to every human institution for the Lord's sake, whether it be to the king as supreme or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the approval of those who do good" (1 Peter 2:13-14). But

this duty is not absolute, as he immediately adds, “Be free, yet without using freedom as a pretext for evil, but as slaves of God” (1 Peter 2:16). The first Pope also pointed out what to do when there is a conflict between the law of God and the law of man, as we read in the *Acts of the Apostles* when the disciples were ordered by the authorities not to teach in the Name of Jesus: “Peter and the apostles said in reply, “We must obey God rather than men”” (Acts 5:29).

This principle is codified in the Catholic Church’s *Code of Canon Law* as follows: “Civil laws to which the law of the Church defers should be observed in canon law with the same effects, insofar as they are not contrary to divine law and unless it is provided otherwise in canon law.”¹

This precedence of divine law over civil law places a responsibility on government officials to make sure that civil laws are not contrary to divine law.

In this regard, during this month of October, designated as Respect Life Month by the Catholic Bishops of the United States, it is important to note that abortion is contrary to both divine law and canon law.² Government officials should act accordingly.

Unfortunately, former Vice-President Joe Biden has said recently that, if he were elected President, he would seek to codify the abortion license of *Roe v. Wade* into federal law if it were overturned in the U.S. Supreme Court³ and he would support the repeal of the Hyde Amendment which prohibits federal funding of abortion.⁴

His running mate, Kamala Harris, has also been strident in her support of abortion. In 2016, for example, as Attorney General of California, Kamala Harris initiated the prosecution of David Daleiden, a journalist with nearly a decade of experience in conducting investigative research on the abortion industry, after he documented Planned Parenthood's illegal sale of body parts from aborted fetuses.⁵ Harris orchestrated the raid of Daleiden's apartment, in which authorities seized a laptop and several hard drives that contained the videos he filmed as part of his exposé of Planned Parenthood.⁶

Joe Biden's and Kamala Harris' vehement support for laws that promote abortion has led many people to ask if it is a sin to vote for them.

In seeking to answer that question, it must be noted first of all that voting itself is not a sin; in fact, it is a good thing to vote.⁷ But voting for someone who promotes an intrinsic evil raises the question of cooperation

with evil. This is where the analysis becomes somewhat complex and does not lend itself to simple yes or no sound bites.

In this regard, Catholic moral theology distinguishes between formal and material cooperation. Formal cooperation is when someone shares the evil intent of the wrongdoer or otherwise “agrees with, condones, or approves of the wrongdoer’s action, at least to some degree. Formal cooperation in the wrongdoing of another is always wrong.”⁸

Material cooperation occurs when “one does not share the intention of the wrongdoer, but is in some way involved with the wrongdoer. . . . Material cooperation is considered immediate when the cooperator’s act assists in the performance of the wrongdoing in an essential way. . . . Material cooperation itself can be distinguished by being ‘proximate’ mediate material cooperation or ‘remote’ mediate material cooperation. . . . Material cooperation requires a proportionately grave reason. The more proximate the cooperation, the more proportionately grave the reasons needed for the action to be justified.”⁹

Applying these principles to the question at hand, voting for someone with the intent to support abortion is formal cooperation and is always sinful. On the other hand, the person who does not intend to support

abortion but votes for someone who will promote abortion becomes a cooperator in an intrinsic evil.

Two points to note here: when we say that an action is sinful, the Church is speaking about an objective reality, not the subjective state of a person's soul before God. According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, "Sins are rightly evaluated according to their gravity. . . . Mortal sin destroys charity in the heart of man by a grave violation of God's law; it turns man away from God, who is his ultimate end and his beatitude, by preferring an inferior good to him. Venial sin allows charity to subsist, even though it offends and wounds it."¹⁰

"For a sin to be mortal, three conditions must together be met: Mortal sin is sin whose object is grave matter and which is also committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent."¹¹ Abortion is always a grave matter, and it is a mortal sin if committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent.

It can be argued that the cooperation in this grave evil when voting is mediate because that one person's vote may not be essential to the procurement of abortion. But mediate cooperation in a grave evil requires a proportionately grave reason to be justified. Over 860,000 abortions took place in 2017, the latest year reported in the U.S.¹² In order to justify voting

for a proponent of abortion, one would need a proportionately grave reason that outweighs the killing of 860,000 babies per year.

Some argue, for example that that the death penalty is a proportionately grave reason. There are two problems, however, with trying to make that moral equivalence. First, capital punishment is not in the same moral category as abortion. While abortion is considered to be an intrinsic evil,¹³ the death penalty has called “inadmissible” by Pope Francis, which is not the same as calling it an intrinsic evil, but is more of a prudential judgment about its efficacy.¹⁴

The second problem with this argument is the lack of numerical equivalency. While over 860,000 abortions took place in our country in the last reported year, there were a total of 22 executions of prisoners in seven states in 2019, with zero executions in the State of Illinois.¹⁵ It is hard to see how voting for someone who opposes the death penalty would be a proportionately grave reason to justify voting for that same candidate who promotes abortion.

Notice that there are several steps that are involved in this reasoning process, only the last of which is for the person to reach a conclusion, but a conclusion nevertheless based on sound moral reasoning.

I acknowledge that the above moral analysis is somewhat complex, but questions of conscience are more than a feeling about right or wrong. The natural law is written on our hearts, but is discerned through reason based on Sacred Scripture and the constant Tradition of the church. I wrote my column on this topic in today's issue of *Catholic Times*, which is available online on our diocesan website at www.dio.org. I encourage you to read and study this text carefully.

“Repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.” At first hearing, this may sound like a neat division of property, asserting that some things belong to the emperor and some things belong to God. In fact, as Jesus knew when He said this, *everything* belongs to God our Creator. The emperor in Jesus' time and the government in our time, as well as all of us, are merely stewards of what God has given to us in His creation. All life, from the moment of conception until natural death, belongs to God. Please pray for our country that we may all live the Gospel of life.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ *Code of Canon Law: Latin-English Edition* (Washington, DC: CLSA, 1983), canon 22.

² *Code of Canon Law*, canon 1398.

³ Alexandra DeSanctis, "Biden Reiterates Promise to Make Roe v. Wade the 'Law of the Land,'" *National Review*, October 6, 2020, accessed online at <https://www.nationalreview.com/corner/biden-reiterates-promise-to-make-roe-v-wade-the-law-of-the-land/>.

⁴ Bobby Allyn, "Biden Reverses Position, Rejects Hyde Amendment, Cites Attacks On Abortion Access," *NPR*, June 6, 2019, accessed online at <https://www.npr.org/2019/06/06/730515910/biden-reverses-position-rejects-hyde-amendment-cites-attacks-on-abortion-access>.

⁵ Madeline Osburn, "Four Years Later, Planned Parenthood Whistleblower Still Trapped In Kamala Harris's Persecution," *The Federalist*, August 20, 2020, accessed online at <https://thefederalist.com/2020/08/20/four-years-later-planned-parenthood-whistleblower-still-trapped-in-kamala-harriss-persecution/>.

⁶ Samuel Smith, "California Atty. Gen Behind Raid of Pro-Life Activist's Apartment Actively Advocates for Planned Parenthood," *The Christian Post*, April 7, 2016, accessed online at <https://www.christianpost.com/news/california-attorney-general-kamala-harris-raid-pro-life-david-daleiden-apartment-planned-parenthood.html>.

⁷ "In the Catholic Tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation." *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2015), n. 13, accessed online at <https://www.usccb.org/offices/justice-peace-human-development/forming-consciences-faithful-citizenship>.

⁸ Principle of Cooperation Task Force of the Catholic Health Association, *Resources About the Principle of Cooperation For the Catholic Health Ministry* (Washington, D.C. and St. Louis, Missouri: Catholic Health Association of the United States, 2013), p. 6.

⁹ CHA Principle of Cooperation Task Force, *Resources About the Principle of Cooperation*, pp. 6-7.

¹⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 1854-1855.

¹¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 1857.

¹² Guttmacher Institute, "Induced Abortion in the United States," September 2019, accessed online at <https://www.guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/induced-abortion-united-states>.

¹³ "A Catholic cannot vote for a candidate who favors a policy promoting an intrinsically evil act, such as abortion, euthanasia, assisted suicide, deliberately subjecting workers or the poor to subhuman living conditions, redefining marriage in ways that violate its essential meaning, or racist behavior, if the voter's intent is to support that position. In such cases, a Catholic would be guilty of formal cooperation in grave evil." USCCB, *Forming Consciences for Faithful*

Citizenship, n. 34, accessed online at <https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/forming-consciences-for-faithful-citizenship-part-one>.

¹⁴ Pope Francis, Address to Participants in the Meeting organized by the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, 11 October 2017, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, October 11, 2017, accessed online at

http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2017/october/documents/papa-francesco_20171011_convegno-nuova-evangelizzazione.html. See also

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2018-08/pope-francis-cdf-ccc-death-penalty-revision-ladaria.html>.

¹⁵ “The Death Penalty in 2019: Year End Report,” Death Penalty Information Center, posted on December 17, 2019, at <https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/facts-and-research/dpic-reports/dpic-year-end-reports/the-death-penalty-in-2019-year-end-report>.