

SALT *and* LIGHT

Party Politics and the Body of Christ

by Tom Chapman

My doctor was smiling as I woke up from the anesthesia. “You must have a very interesting job, Tom,” my doctor said. “You help people with the formation of their conscience and encourage them to take action? Very interesting.”

I finally realized I must have been giving part of a “Faithful Citizenship” presentation in my sleep. As a state Catholic Conference director, that says something about my interest in the subject!

Every election cycle brings many requests from parishes for presentations about “Faithful Citizenship” and what the Catholic bishops have to say about our political activity as laypeople.

Catholics who take the time to attend these presentations often identify strongly with a particular political party. So one of the first things I do is ask attendees to put aside their political party and take on their identity as a member of the Body of Christ. We



discuss political issues and the principles of our social teaching as Catholics first.

It’s essential we do so. Political party talking points are just that. They are shorthand sound bites designed to inflame the base and drive people to one side or the other of an issue.

On the other hand, God speaking to us through Scripture gives us some pretty clear direction: “You shall not kill.” We are to “bring glad tidings to the poor. / . . . proclaim liberty to captives / and recovery of sight to the blind, / to let the oppressed go free” (Lk 4:18). Our cause, as *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* says, “is the defense of human life and dignity.”

The principles of Catholic social teaching—dignity of the human person, subsidiarity, the common good, and solidarity—frame how the Church considers specific issues and invite reflection on the best specific response.

Some are fearful about what this fall’s presidential general election will mean for our country. But what a critical time it is to consider why and how our Catholic faith is calling us to get involved in politics, discuss the very real challenges we have in society, and figure out what we can do to meet those challenges. The message of the Church is needed now more than ever.

Politics doesn’t need to be a dirty word. We can be the ones who help others inform their conscience, find their voice, and take their faith everywhere, even the voting booth. Maybe even talking in our sleep!

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