



Faithful Citizenship: Catholics and the Election

Fr. Roger J. Landry • Merton Institute for Catholic Life • September 30, 2024



FORMING
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FOR **FAITHFUL**
CITIZENSHIP

A Call to Political Responsibility from the
Catholic Bishops of the United States

with New Introductory Note



United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Introduction

- Lots of Catholics have and ask questions about how to be faithful in the public arena, particularly when it comes to voting.
- There are many who put out “voter guides” or who through social media and other sources give contradictory information as to whether it’s possible morally to vote for certain candidates.
- Catholics who are seeking to unite the area of voting to their faith in Jesus Christ hope for guidance.
- Especially for students voting sometimes for the first time, it’s key to know what the expectations are.
- Tonight’s talk is about describing the principles that should guide us as we approach this very important area. It’s not about persuading you to vote for or against a particular candidate in any particular election.



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Scriptural Background

- Our Catholic vocation to be the “salt of the earth”(Mt 5:13) and “light of the world” (Mt 5:14) and leaven (Mt 13:13).
- “Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God” (Mt 22:21).
- Jesus to Pilate: “You would have no authority over me if it had not been given to you from above” (Jn 19:8).
- “Let every person be subordinate to the higher authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been established by God. Therefore, whoever resists authority opposes what God has appointed, and those who oppose it will bring judgment upon themselves” (Rom 13:1 ff).
- “I ask that supplications, prayers, petitions and thanksgivings be offered for everyone, for kings and for all in authority, that we may lead a tranquil life in all devotion and dignity” (1 Tim 2:1).



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Voting is a Moral Act

- Vatican II: “All citizens are to bear in mind that it is both their right and duty to use their free vote to promote the common good” (GS 75). Each of us has a responsibility for the common good. It is neither something that others can justly deny us nor something we can morally forsake.
- The Catechism of the Catholic Church lists exercising the right to vote as one of the three basic moral obligations — the other two are paying taxes and defending one’s country — that flow from our joint responsibility for the common good (2240).
- One of the principal means by which Christians can peacefully raise up their cultures (leaven), prevent corruption (salt), and illuminate their fellow men and women about right and wrong (light) is through their participation in the electoral process.
- Voting is a moral act. Not to vote is to neglect one’s responsibility for others and for society.



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- Many Christians take their responsibility at the ballot box very seriously. They recognize that in a democratic society, we essentially get the leaders we deserve, and each person eligible to vote bears some responsibility for the leaders we have and the decisions they make.
- Many citizens, Christian and otherwise, however, shirk this important duty, either partially or fully. One-third of citizens in our country do not bother even to register to vote. Of those who are registered, four out of ten almost never show up at the ballot box, even in a tightly-contested general election for president.
- This apathy is nothing short of a moral and civic cancer. The less people hold themselves accountable to their personal responsibilities toward the common good, the less they hold their elected representatives responsible for the common good, and the easier it is for elected representatives to take advantage of them against the common good. It should not be surprising that several politicians have.



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- The person who either consciously or carelessly chooses not to vote is morally a little like Pontius Pilate, who washed his hands of Jesus, or the Levite who passed the suffering man on the opposite side of the road. Not voting could be a sin of omission.
- But showing up — as important as it is — is not enough. Although increased voter turnout is a good, it is a limited one. The fulfillment of our moral responsibilities with regard to elections is not a question merely of voting, but of voting well.
- How we vote is sign of what we value most. When we pull the curtain of the ballot box behind us, it is similar to pulling behind us the curtain of the confessional, in which we stand hidden before God and confess who we are and what we prioritize.



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- Some people make their political party an idol and vote the party-line no matter what particular candidates hold. Others vote for or against a candidate solely on the basis of superficial criteria, like the person's last name, ethnicity, looks, sex or hometown. Others worship a modern golden calf and choose the candidate they deem will pad their pockets the most.
- Others look to the most serious crises of our day and try to determine, on the basis of the character and positions of the candidates, which would best govern or legislate in accordance with fundamental moral truths.
- Sometimes the choice is between apples and oranges, two good candidates who vary simply on prudential implementation of sound principles. At other times the choice is between Christ and Barabbas.
- But the reality remains that whom we decide to support and why are moral decisions that express and form our character, and for which we will be voted upon by God. For that reason, we should wisely vote only after much prayer, which should mark all of our important decisions.



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Guidance from the U.S. Bishops


- *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States.*
- Originally published in 2007. Updated and republished in 2016. New introduction and republication in 2023.
- “While the bishops help form the laity in accordance with basic principles, they do not tell the laity to vote for particular candidates. On these often complex matters, it is the laity’s responsibility to form their consciences and grow in the virtue of prudence to approach the many and varied issues of the day with the mind of Christ.”
- “The Church has an important role in the formation of conscience. Each Catholic has a corresponding moral responsibility to hear, receive, and act upon the Church’s teaching in the lifelong task of forming his or her own conscience.”



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Guidance from the U.S. Bishops

- “The Church’s obligation to participate in shaping the moral character of society is a requirement of our faith. It is a basic part of the mission we have received from Jesus Christ, who offers a vision of life revealed to us in Sacred Scripture and Tradition.”
- “Our nation’s tradition of pluralism is enhanced, not threatened, when religious groups and people of faith bring their convictions and concerns into public life.”
- “Our purpose is to help Catholics form their consciences in accordance with God’s truth. We recognize that the responsibility to make choices in political life rests with each individual in light of a properly formed conscience, and that participation goes well beyond casting a vote in a particular election.”
- “Church teaching is coherent and rests on a comprehensive vision of the dignity of the human person. . . . The foundational principles that guide these teachings should not be ignored in any case nor used selectively to serve partisan interests.”



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Guidance from the U.S. Bishops

- “Responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation ... rooted in our baptismal commitment to follow Jesus Christ and to bear Christian witness in all we do. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us, “As far as possible citizens should take an active part in public life” (1913-1915)
- “As citizens, we should be guided more by our moral convictions than by our attachment to a political party or interest group. When necessary, our participation should help transform the party to which we belong; we should not let the party transform us in such a way that we neglect or deny fundamental moral truths or approve intrinsically evil acts. We are called to bring together our principles and our political choices, our values and our votes, to help build a civilization of truth and love.”



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The Privilege of Political Responsibility

- At a divided time, full of anxiety and spiritual trial, where fears are being stoked, where there is demonization of opponents and often blatant lies, Catholics are summoned to get involved according to a “different kind of political engagement: one shaped by the moral convictions of well-formed consciences and focused on the dignity of every human being, the pursuit of the common good, and the protection of the weak and the vulnerable.”
- Catholic citizens are called to help address various national contradictions like:
 - “Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” while the right to life is not fully protected.
 - An affluent society where too many live in poverty and lack health care and other necessities of life.
 - “Liberty and justice for all,” while often divided across race, ethnicity, and economic inequality.
 - Peacemakers in a nation with the world’s most prominent military.
 - A nation of immigrants, struggling to embrace new immigrants.
 - A society built on the strength of families, with marriages being undermined.



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The Conscience

- “Catholics have a serious and lifelong obligation to form their consciences in accord with human reason and the teaching of the Church. Conscience is not something that allows us to justify doing whatever we want, nor is it a mere ‘feeling’ about what we should or should not do. Rather, conscience is the voice of God resounding in the human heart, revealing the truth to us and calling us to do what is good while shunning what is evil.”
- “Conscience always requires serious attempts to make sound moral judgments based on the truths of our faith. As stated in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, “Conscience is a judgment of reason whereby the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act that he is going to perform, is in the process of performing, or has already completed. In all he says and does, man is obliged to follow faithfully what he knows to be just and right” (CCC 1778).



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The Conscience

- “The formation of conscience includes several elements.
 - A desire to embrace goodness and truth; a willingness and openness to seek the truth and what is right by studying Scripture and the teaching of the Church.
 - An examination of the facts and background information about various choices.
 - Prayerful reflection to discern the will of God.
- “If we fail to form our conscience in the light of the truths of the faith and the moral teachings of the Church, we can make erroneous judgments.”
- “The Church fosters well-formed consciences not only by teaching moral truth but also by encouraging its members to develop the virtue of prudence, which shapes and informs our ability to deliberate over available alternatives, to determine what is most fitting to a specific context, and to act decisively.”



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Intrinsically Evil Actions

- “There are some things we must never do, as individuals or as a society, because they are always incompatible with love of God and neighbor. Such actions are so deeply flawed that they are always opposed to the authentic good of persons. These are called “intrinsically evil” actions. They must always be rejected and opposed and must never be supported or condoned.”
- The bishops list several: abortion, euthanasia, human cloning, destruction of embryos, genocide, torture, targeting of non-combatants in terror or war, racism, subjecting workers to inhuman living conditions, treating the poor as disposable, redefining marriage to deny its essential meaning.
- US Bishops: “Those who knowingly, willingly, and directly support public policies or legislation that undermine fundamental moral principles cooperate with evil.”



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Intrinsically Evil Actions


- 2004 Ratzinger advice to US Bishops: “A Catholic would be guilty of formal cooperation in evil, and so unworthy to present himself for Holy Communion, if he were deliberately to vote for a candidate precisely because of the candidate’s permissive stand on abortion and/or euthanasia.”
- Formal cooperation means to share the bad will or intention of the other committing the sin; in this case, it would mean that one agrees with the candidate’s support of abortion.
- Cardinal Ratzinger continued, “When a Catholic does not share a candidate’s stand in favor of abortion and/or euthanasia, but votes for that candidate for other reasons, it is considered remote material cooperation, which can be permitted in the presence of proportionate reasons.”



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Intrinsically Evil Actions

- Cardinal Ratzinger didn't specify what could be "proportionate" to the sin of the destruction of innocent human life, the reasons would morally have to outweigh the evil done by the candidate's advancing of the cause of the destruction of innocent human life.
- They would have to be sufficient to justify one's actions before Christ in the next life or before an aborted child.
- They would be similar to reasons that would persuade an African-American or a Jew to vote for the same candidate in the same election if he were, respectively, also firmly racist or anti-Semitic. Catholics need to be at least as much against abortion in their practical political decisions as African Americans are against racism and Jews against anti-Semitism.
- "A Catholic cannot vote for a candidate who favors a policy promoting an intrinsically evil act ... if the voter's intent is to support that position. In such cases, a Catholic would be guilty of formal cooperation in grave evil."



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Intrinsically Evil Actions

- “As Catholics we are not single-issue voters. A candidate’s position on a single issue is not sufficient to guarantee a voter’s support. Yet if a candidate’s position on a single issue promotes an intrinsically evil act ... a voter may legitimately disqualify a candidate from receiving support.”
- “There may be times when a Catholic who rejects a candidate’s unacceptable position even on policies promoting an intrinsically evil act may reasonably decide to vote for that candidate for other morally grave reasons. Voting in this way would be permissible only for truly grave moral reasons, not to advance narrow interests or partisan preferences or to ignore a fundamental moral evil.”
- “When all candidates hold a position that promotes an intrinsically evil act, the conscientious voter faces a dilemma. The voter may decide to take the extraordinary step of not voting for any candidate or, after careful deliberation, may decide to vote for the candidate deemed less likely to advance such a morally flawed position and more likely to pursue other authentic human goods.”



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Two Temptations

- To propose “a moral equivalence that makes no ethical distinctions between different kinds of issues involving human life and dignity.
- To misuse “these necessary moral distinctions as a way of dismissing or ignoring other serious threats to human life and dignity” like environmental degradation, racism, unjust discrimination, the death penalty, unjust war, torture, war crimes, poverty and hunger, health care, pornography, attempts to redefine marriage, attacks on religious liberty, unjust immigration policy.
- “These are not optional concerns that can be dismissed. ... Although choices about how best to respond to these and other compelling threats to human life and dignity are matters for principled debate and decision, this does not make them optional concerns.”



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Conscientious Deliberation

- “The permanent principles of the Church’s social doctrine constitute the very heart of Catholic social teaching. These are the principles of: the dignity of the human person, . . . the common good, subsidiarity, and solidarity.
- “Catholic voters should use the framework of Catholic social teaching to examine candidates’ positions on issues affecting human life and dignity as well as issues of justice and peace, and they should consider candidates’ integrity, philosophy, and performance.”



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Dignity of the Person

- “Human life is sacred. The dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. Direct attacks on innocent persons are never morally acceptable, at any stage or in any condition.”
- It specifies abortion, euthanasia, assisted suicide, human cloning, in vitro fertilization, and the destruction of human embryos for research.
- It adds torture, unjust war, the indiscriminate use of drones for violent purposes; genocide, attacks against noncombatants, racism, human trafficking, poverty and suffering.



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Subsidiarity

- “The principle of subsidiarity reminds us that larger institutions in society should not overwhelm or interfere with smaller or local institutions, yet larger institutions have essential responsibilities when the more local institutions cannot adequately protect human dignity, meet human needs, and advance the common good.”
- “The human person is not only sacred but also social. Full human development takes place in relationship with others. The family—based on marriage between a man and a woman—is the first and fundamental unit of society and is a sanctuary for the creation and nurturing of children. It should be defended and strengthened, not redefined, undermined, or further distorted. Respect for the family should be reflected in every policy and program. It is important to uphold parents’ rights and responsibilities to care for their children, including the right to choose their children’s education.”



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Common Good

- “Human dignity is respected and the common good is fostered only if human rights are protected and basic responsibilities are met.” Like the right to life, access to food and shelter, education and employment, health care and housing, freedom of religion and family life. ... Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities—to one another, to our families, and to the larger society.”
- “The economy must serve people, not the other way around, ... by respecting the dignity of work and protecting the rights of workers.”
- “We have a duty to care for God’s creation, or as Pope Francis refers to it, ‘our common home.’ ... Care for creation is a duty of our faith and a sign of our concern for all people, especially the poor.”



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Solidarity

- “We are one human family, whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. We are our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers, wherever they may be. ... Solidarity includes the scriptural call to welcome the stranger among us—including immigrants seeking work—by ensuring that they have opportunities for a safe home, education for their children, and a decent life for their families and by ending the practice of separating families through deportation.”
- “In light of the Gospel’s invitation to be peacemakers, our commitment to solidarity with our neighbors—at home and abroad—also demands that we promote peace and pursue justice in a world marred by terrible violence and conflict.
- “Special emphasis must be given to the Church’s preferential option for the poor. ... A basic moral test for any society is how it treats those who are most vulnerable,” like the poor, persons with disabilities, elderly, terminally ill, victims of injustice and immigrants.



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Major Issues

- “In light of these principles and the blessings we share as part of a free and democratic nation, we vigorously repeat our call for a renewed kind of politics: focused more on moral principles than on the latest polls; focused more on the needs of the weak than on benefits for the strong; focused more on the pursuit of the common good than on the demands of narrow interests.”
- “Politics is a noble mission to promote the common good. As such, it is about ethics and principles as well as issues, candidates, and officeholders. To engage in ‘politics,’ then, is more than getting involved in current polemics and debates; it is about acting with others and through institutions for the benefit of all.
- The bishops call Catholics conscientiously to get involve in various major issues.



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Major Issues Specified

- Protection of human life
- Promotion of peace
- Marriage and Family life, including children, work, divorce, taxes, immigration and welfare
- Religious Liberty
- Economic justice, including the rights of workers, the preferential option for the poor, appropriate welfare policy, social security and affordable housing.
- Accessible and affordable health care.
- Migration
- Catholic education
- Promotion of justice and countering violence, including fixing a broken criminal justice system.
- Care for our common home.
- Appropriate regulation of communications, media and culture, respecting freedom of speech but addresses lowering of standards, offensive materials and more.
- Global solidarity and focus on poverty, underdevelopment, religious liberty, human rights, refugees, the crisis in the Middle East, and the United Nations.



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Goals for Public Life

- “Catholic teaching challenges voters and candidates to consider the moral and ethical dimensions of public policy issues. In their light, we offer the following policy goals that we hope will guide Catholics as they form their consciences and reflect on the moral dimensions of their public choices.”
- “Not all issues are equal; these ten goals address matters of different moral weight and urgency. Some involve intrinsically evil acts, which can never be approved. Others involve affirmative obligations to seek the common good.”
- “These and similar goals can help voters and candidates act on ethical principles rather than particular interests and partisan allegiances.”
- “We hope Catholics will ask candidates how they intend to help our nation pursue the following important goals.”



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Goals for Public Life

- These are meant to guide Catholic citizens in their voting and in all of their other involvement in public life.
 - To protect the weakest in our midst
 - Stop turning to violence to solve problems
 - Protect the fundamental understanding of marriage.
 - Comprehensive immigration reform
 - Helping families and children to overcome poverty
 - Provide health care while respecting human life, dignity and religious freedom.
 - Oppose prejudicial policies and hostility toward immigrants
 - Encourage families to overcome poverty, advance the common good and care for the environment.
 - Observe moral limits to the use of military force
 - Internationally pursue peace, protect human rights and religious liberty, advance economic justice and care for creation.



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Catholics and Public Office

- One way to live out the vocation to be salt, light and leaven is to serve in public office, either as a candidate for office, in the legislative or executive branches, or in electoral politics.
- American Catholics have had a long track record of serving in public office. Many have distinguished themselves by their holiness in office. Others have checkered records in terms of legislative or executive policies and decisions. Some unabashedly oppose Church teaching.
- Saint Thomas More is the patron saint of statesmen. A man of conscience who wouldn't violate it in the service of the king. He died the King's good servant, but God's first. He gave to God the things that are God's.
- Many pieces of legislation are ethically challenging. Some are evil and must be opposed. Some are mixed. It's possible, sometimes, under the principle of double-effect, to try to lessen the harm of bad policy. One must be opposed to the evil and can't will it, just foresee and tolerate it.

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The “Catholic” Case for Harris

From Catholics4Kamala.com

Which Presidential Candidate Has the Qualities Our Country Needs Most?



Youthful and joyful

Looks forward to the future

Advocates for the well-being of all

Focused on the Common Good

Inclusive and affirming

Hopeful



Dated and angry

Immersed in the past

Argues for his own self-interests

Focused on divisions in our country

Exclusionary and derisive

Pessimistic



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The “Catholic” Case for Harris

From Catholics4Kamala.com

- “Catholics are coming together to support the Harris-Walz ticket because of the threat that a second Trump presidency poses to reverse the progress against global warming, to explode the deficit with more tax cuts, to transform the Justice Department into an instrument for vindictiveness, to abandon Ukraine in its fight for sovereignty, and to hamstring our economy through a massive race-centered deportation operation. Even on the life issue, there is an eerie silence among conservatives about the rise in abortion numbers nationally since the Dobbs decision reversing *Roe v. Wade*.”
- “A Harris-Walz administration looks forward to the promise of an America that embraces and celebrates our diversity among people of many races, beliefs, and genders — an America that is caring and uplifting for all, seeks to provide the opportunity for everyone to achieve their God-given potential, and brings joy back to our politics!”
- The effort “to activate multi-issue Catholic voters and provide them — as well as candidates who are committed to the common good and lifting up the quality of life for all Americans— with the tools they need to be informed and to be engaged Catholic voters who are concerned about issues of social justice, immigration, climate change, and the scourge of White Christian Nationalism.”



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The “Catholic” Case for Trump

From Catholics.donaldjtrump.com

- “He did more for Catholics than any administration in history”
- “President Trump signed an executive order to ensure that religious institutions can freely advocate for candidates and causes in line with their values by relaxing enforcement of the Johnson Amendment, which barred churches and charities from engaging in political campaigns at the risk of losing their tax-exempt status.”
- “President Trump’s Department of Health and Human Services created a new Conscience and Religious Freedom Division and advocated for stronger enforcement of legal protections for Americans with religious and moral objections to certain health care services.”



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The “Catholic” Case for Trump

From Catholics.donaldjtrump.com

- From Catholics.donaldjtrump.com
- “Trump established the White House Faith and Opportunity Initiative to advise the White House on faith-based concerns and find ways to partner with faith-based organizations.”
- “In 2018, Trump became the first president to address the March for Life rally and declared January 20, 2019 the National Sanctity of Human Life Day.”
- “Unlike the Harris-Biden administration, which has systematically undermined these fundamental rights, President Trump has stood unwaveringly in defense of traditional values and the sanctity of human life. Catholics for Trump stands with President Trump to continue building a nation where the rights of every individual to practice their faith freely is protected.”

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under
“Most Recent Talks”

Fr. Roger J. Landry
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The screenshot shows the homepage of the website 'Catholic Preaching' by Fr. Roger J. Landry, Diocese of Fall River. The header includes the site logo and a navigation menu with links for Home, Homilies, Articles, Plan of Life Book, Retreats, Teaching, Biography, and Search. The main content area features a 'Welcome!' section with a photo of Fr. Landry and a quote from Cardinal Edmund Szoka. Below this are sections for 'Most Recent Homilies', 'Most Recent Articles', and 'Most Recent Talks', each listing recent content with dates.

Catholic Preaching
Fr. Roger J. Landry, Diocese of Fall River

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Welcome!

I warmly welcome you to this website, put together at the insistence and with the assistance of friends.

During my diaconal ordination, Cardinal Edmund Szoka gave me the following instruction from the Ordination Rite as together we gripped the Book of the Gospels:

"Receive the Gospel of Christ, whose herald you now are. Believe what you read. Teach what you believe. Practice what you teach."

Those words have never lost their resonance.

Since that day -- October 8, 1998 -- I have tried to live up to that commission to be a "herald of the Gospel," by striving to teach what the Church believes, to practice what I preach to others, and to spread with joy and enthusiasm the truth Christ has entrusted to His Church -- in and out of season, in and out of the pulpit.

This website is a chronicle of those attempts. You may also follow postings of articles, homilies and teachings on Facebook, Twitter and Youtube.

You can also subscribe to the podcast of daily homilies, lectures and talks through Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts and iHeart Podcasts.

It constitutes the "five loaves and two fish" (or even less!) that I have placed into the hands of the Lord as an attempt to feed a hungry crowd, confident that, if He wishes, He can multiply and supplement that meager offering to nourish many more (Jn 6:1-14).

In Christ,
Fr. Roger J. Landry

Most Recent Homilies

- Ascending and Descending with the Archangels, Feast of the Archangels, September 29, 2022
- Responding to the Lord's Call Promptly, Fully and Perseveringly, 26th Wednesday (II), September 28, 2022
- Resolutely Determining to Welcome Jesus However He Comes, 26th Tuesday (II), September 27, 2022
- The Receptivity to God at the Root of Christian Greatness, 26th Monday (II), September 26, 2022
- Becoming Lazarists through Listening to Moses, the Prophets and the Risen One, 26th Sunday (C), September 25, 2022

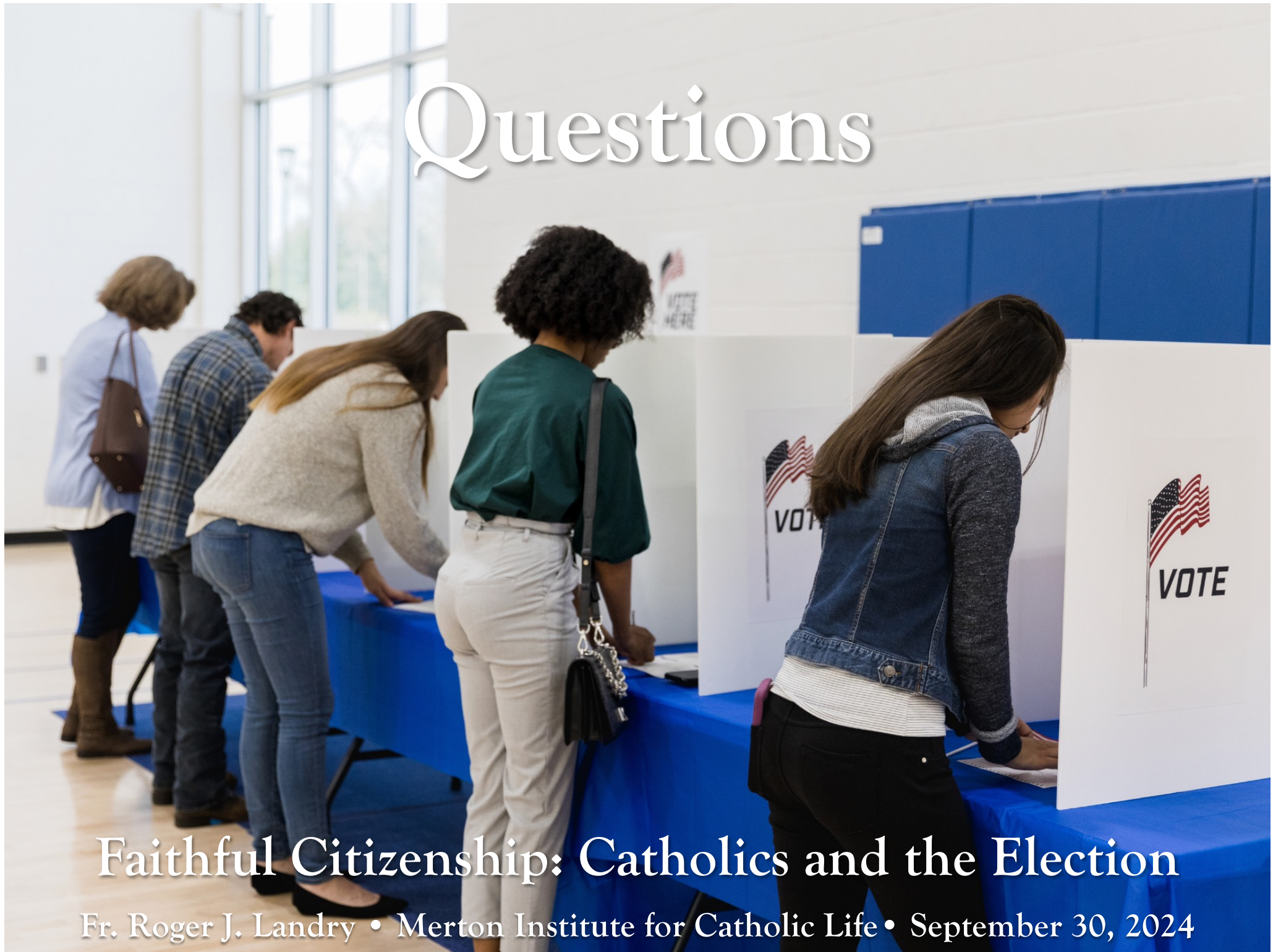
Most Recent Articles

- St. Therese's Little Way of Eucharistic Love and Life, The Anchor, September 30, 2022
- Taking Seriously Attacks on Churches and Pro-Life Institutions, The Anchor, September 16, 2022
- The Eucharistic Shape of Cardinal Van Thuan's Holy and Heroic Life, The Anchor, September 16, 2022
- The Eucharistic Life of Saint Teresa of Calcutta, The Anchor, September 2, 2022
- Lessons from the Conversion of Shia LaBeouf, The Anchor, September 2, 2022
- A Post-Pandemic Time for Ecclesial Assessment, The Anchor, August 19, 2022
- A Unique Place for Eucharistic Revival, The

Most Recent Talks

- Imitating the Manly Faith and Courage of the North American Martyrs, Diocese of Albany Men's Conference, August 20, 2022
- Eucharistic Unity of Life, Murray Hill Conference for Priests, August 4, 2022
- Masculinity, Perseverance, and Vocation, An Interview with the Catholic Gentleman, August 3, 2022
- The Power of the Powerless: Walking the Way of Truth, Napa Institute, July 28, 2022
- Daring to Do All You Can, Parish Eucharistic Mission, St. Monica's Parish, Kalamazoo, MI, July 16-19, 2022
- Day of Recollection for the Seminararians of the Rome Experience, Bracciano Italy, July

Questions



Faithful Citizenship: Catholics and the Election

Fr. Roger J. Landry • Merton Institute for Catholic Life • September 30, 2024