

TEN COMMANDMENTS FOR NOVEMBER 3

The two national conventions have now concluded and the parties agreed on only one thing: This will be the most consequential election in the nation's history. Of course politicians say this every time an election comes along, but this time no one is using hyperbole. Given this existential and scary fact, how can we best prepare to make a wise choice?

The decision is both political and moral in scope. The political dimension is primarily secular. But for moral guidance it might not be a bad idea to look to our Catholic faith tradition. Biblically, several teachings come to mind: (1) "The second [commandment] is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Mk. 12:31). (2) "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). (3) "But a Samaritan traveler who came upon him was moved with compassion at the sight [of the man who had been stripped, beaten, and left half-dead]" (Lk. 10:30, 33). (4) "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (Jn. 14:6)--- "You will know the Truth and the Truth will set you free" (Jn. 8:32). (5) "The Light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it....The true Light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world" (Jn. 1: 5, 9). (6) "I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their teachings, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in You, that they may also be one in us..." (Jn. 17:20-21). Following from these passages are the social justice teachings of the church, grounded in the very being of Jesus Christ.

There are many issues surrounding this election and we can all come up with a different list of our priorities. I suggest framing our preferences as ten "commandments", mandates for the next Administration and Congress. Following is my list of ten, upon which we need to reflect in light of our Faith in order to make the best choices our conscience will allow.

- (1) Climate change must be acknowledged and serious measures taken to address it.
- (2) A comprehensive approach to issues of "pro-life" must be adopted. This would include not only policies that protect the lives of the unborn, but efforts to respect the dignity of human life everywhere. This implies not only national, but international endeavors as well. Our country must seek not only its own "greatness", but the human greatness of All, which calls for improved relations with our allies, resistance to incursions into our internal affairs by our enemies, and a renewed struggle to bring about nuclear disarmament.
- (3) Increased efforts must be made to eradicate systemic racism in our culture. These efforts would include reform of the criminal justice system and abolition of the death penalty, both of which are steeped in racism.

(4) A national strategy must be adopted to defeat Covid-19 and establish safeguards to head off any such pandemic in the future.

(5) Health care for every individual in our country should be acknowledged as a fundamental human right and steps taken to move toward honoring that right.

(6) A national strategy must be devised to address the economic devastation flowing from the effects of Covid-19. Tax policy must be designed that ends the ever-increasing gap between the wealthy and the rest of our people.

(7) A balance must be struck between spending on defense that works mainly to enrich contractors and vital needs such as the education of our children.

(8) Immigration policy must be reformed to allow reasonable entry of those most in need to our country, to provide a path to citizenship for the undocumented already here, and to offer a secure future for the DACA youth.

(9) Elimination of the violence that pervades our culture must be a priority; this would include reshaping of the police force and methods of law enforcement, as well as enlightened policy for management of weapons, especially those used in mass killings. We must ask: "What takes precedence? The Second Amendment or the Second Commandment of Jesus?"

(10) We must demand leadership that unequivocally and unceasingly gives the people of this nation the Truth, for without Truth we can never achieve the oneness for which Christ prayed.

Now, our challenge is to apply the guidance of the Word of God and the teachings of the Church to these demands, no easy task. To simply decide on the basis of a gut feeling, the opinions of our "support" groups, the pundits of the Media, whether Fox, CNN or MSNBC, or speech makers at one Convention or another, would be a betrayal – both of the calling of our Faith and the trust put in the people of this nation by our Founding Fathers.

We live in a country that is pervaded by both Darkness and Light. The Darkness is reflected in the needs for change addressed by the ten "new commandments." The Light shines in the basic goodness of our people - which we see every time a tragedy strikes and thousands come forth to minister to the injuries of the victims. We must call upon our inherent wisdom to select leadership that abandons the Darkness and harnesses the power of those who dwell in the Light.

A wise choice requires that we consult both secular wisdom and divine guidance. Suppose we reflect on how this might work for just a few of the "commandments?"

- (a) Climate Change and Global Warming: What does science tell us? We are informed that unless meaningful measures are taken by the end of this decade, the damage done to the planet will be irreversible. What does our Faith tell us? If we love our neighbor, we will care about the folks being devastated by the wildfires in California or the hurricanes on the east coast.
- (b) Racism: Common sense tells us that unless we rid our culture of this curse, we will have only more inequity, violence, poverty and dysfunctionality of our society. Biblical Faith instructs us that we must overcome racial and national divisions. There can be no preference for Greek or Hebrew.
- (c) Secular wisdom advises us that we cannot solve difficult problems by denying their existence, by lying to ourselves and one another. Biblically we are assured that the Truth, and only the Truth, will set us free.

So, this is my challenge to each of you: Examine the mandates, think about the facts and the best knowledge you can acquire relevant to each candidate. Think of all of the issues and make a choice that selects the leadership that can do the best job not on just one priority, but on the mandates as a total group. Then make a final, prayerful decision, for this indeed will be the most vital election in the recent history, if not the whole history, our nation!