

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ

The general election is due and already the politicians are displaying their wares.

Our duty as citizens is to vote. Our duty as Catholics is to vote according to our faith. In other words where we put our cross must be where we believe that the candidate and the party for which he stands is the best in addressing the issues of the day.

Our slogan as a Conference of Bishops is “vote your faith; not your party”. Undoubtedly all the parties presenting themselves for election will wish to address issues of justice, of national security, financial stability, appropriate response to immigration balancing the good of those who come with those who are here, of the best possible provision of health care and the care of the elderly, of law and order, and the addressing of widespread poverty which is not just physical but also cultural and spiritual.

You will expect the parties to avoid some of the other, in some ways more fundamental issues, which will divide not only party from party, but citizen from citizen. No party wants to stand for the sanctity of human life from conception to natural death; no party wants to stand up for the family as the essential building brick of society. No party wants to say that civil unions are not the same as marriage. No party, it seems, considers the rights of conscience, where properly informed, as paramount, only to be limited when it can be shown that such liberty is the enemy of the liberties of others also conscientiously held. No-one is prepared to say openly, and mean it, that inclusivity is not the same as uniformity, but means equality before the law, and the right of citizens to make their own choices within it. This includes such liberties as the right of parents to choose what sort of education they will have for their children, including the maintenance of faith schools, it will mean the right of parents to expect that a child if adopted is adopted according to their own principles, the principles of the church to which they belong, they must be found a place within a natural family. It will mean the rights of citizens to declare, and expect to be heard, the care of the terminally ill and those who are depressed, not allowed to be addressed condoning suicide or euthanasia, with its concomitant fear on the part of the elderly that their deaths will be compassed, rather than their lives made tolerable with the best of palliative medicine and tender nursing. I mean the rights of citizens to question the morality of the use or threatened use of weapons of mass destruction, such as Trident, and expect governments to listen.

It will mean the control of the press, that it does not assume what is the role of the judiciary condemning people and institutions before they have a right of defence in courts which are impartial and not that of whipped up public fever; mean the right of citizens to live in peace, able to depend upon the honest motives and integrity of those whom they elect to government, who are in charge of the banking system of the country, to have control of the mass media of communications.

The parties our parents and grandparents voted for stood for the rights of workers; for universal education and better schools; for housing that better became the dignity of individuals and the needs of families; for the curtailment of privileges on the part of the

landowners and wealthy. They stood for such issues of social justice. They were not faced, as we are today, with new injustices and social upheavals. They were not faced with the injustice of the destruction of the unborn in the womb, nor were they required to face the unwisdom of equating with marriage other sexual partnerships; nor had they to deal with the suffocating bureaucracy which prevents so many professional people from being able to exercise their discretion dealing with the matters for which they are qualified. These were not issues for them as they are for us today, though it is impossible to distinguish one party from another in respect of them. We hear that there is talk of change as if any change were for the better. There are party manifestoes which in practice leave no opportunity for party members to defer from them on ethical issues. There is party spin which leaves the electorate unsure whether they are hearing the full truth so it is more difficult for those who have to vote today.

My advice is to recognise, where you can, the integrity of the individual candidates and vote according to your hunch that they can be trusted in those matters which, according to your faith, are as important as any which are subject of law, and in some instances the most fundamental of all.

Remember finally that no-one is bound to any law that does not accord with the law of God.

If I say to you “vote your faith”, then I mean be enlightened by it, prayerfully reflect on the issues, and put your cross where it is deserved.

With all good wishes.

Yours devotedly in Christ,

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