In our scripture selection from 2 Maccabees at Mass this weekend we are presented a horrifying story of a family that faced torture and execution rather than submit to the will of the unjust king, Antiochus. This family chose to follow God’s Law rather than the edicts of their captors (to eat pork), even though it meant giving up their lives. It is important to note that this display of heroic fidelity was possible, in part, due to their foundational belief in the resurrection of the dead. Reflection on our belief in the resurrection would be more than enough for a meditation on this weekend’s scriptures, but I will trust that the homilies you will hear this weekend will adequately address this issue. I will instead focus on something that is heavy on my heart as we enter a week where we will vote for state, local, and federal leaders.

Many of us will feel called to vote according to our Catholic beliefs, and given the current choices, will also feel more than a little challenged by the choices that are offered. I appreciate that you have heard more than you already want on this subject, but I find that there is something missing from what I have heard regarding how we are called to be faithful to our Catholic beliefs in this time of divisive politics. More importantly, how can we find peace in our hearts, in our families, and in our faith communities during this time of rancorous debate in our country?

There is help for us with this dilemma from our Church and it is easy to access this information on the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops website in the document titled Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship. This is a document that I recommend every voting aged Catholic read before casting their ballots this coming week. Here is the

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Our bishops call us to our moral responsibility; to listen, receive, and act upon the Church’s social teaching in the lifelong task of forming our conscience. For a Catholic, conscience is formed by scripture, the Church’s magisterium and prayerful reflection on one’s experience. (cf. Catechism Sec. #1, Ch. 1, Art. 6 Conscience)

Regarding the Church’s teaching, there are four guiding principles, which underlie the Church’s instruction to the faithful. They are: (1) the dignity of the human person, (2) the common good, (3) subsidiarity, and (4) solidarity. Under these four principals there are seven themes, which you will recognize. They are: (1) All human life is sacred, (2) support of the traditional family and not redefined, (3) active participation of community groups and associations, (4) human rights, (5) dignity of work and the rights of workers, (6) care for God’s creation, and (7) a preferential option for the poor. In all this we are to attend to our civic duties and avoid the temptation to pick and choose what guides our actions.

Faithful Citizenship lists two temptations and two duties. Our two duties are: (1) Opposing evil and (2) doing good. Opposing evil means that there are some things that are always evil and that we must never do: taking of human life as in abortion and euthanasia, human cloning, destruction of human embryos. Other direct assaults on human life are genocide, torture, and targeting non-combatants. Doing good includes responding to the needs of our neighbors basic needs such as food, shelter, health care, education and meaningful work. All these are important and none should be neglected.

There are two temptations that we need to avoid. The first is making a moral equivalence that makes no distinction between different kinds of issues involving human life and dignity. The direct and intentional destruction of human life is always wrong and is not just one issue among many. It must always be opposed from the moment of conception to natural death. Taking a life is never right, whether it is in a hospital room, the battlefield, or in a prison death chamber.

The second temptation is the misuse of these necessary moral distinctions as a way of dismissing or ignoring other serious threats to human life and dignity. The current and projected extent of environmental degradation has become a moral crisis especially because it poses a risk to humanity in the future and threatens the lives of poor and vulnerable human persons here and now. Racism and other unjust discrimination, the use of the death penalty, resorting to unjust war, the use of torture, war crimes, the failure to respond to those who are suffering from hunger or a lack of health care, pornography, redefining marriage, compromising religious liberty, or an unjust immigration policy are all serious moral issues that challenge our consciences and require us to act. These are not optional concerns, which can be dismissed.

There are other considerations when selecting a candidate for your vote. 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, such as legal abortion, redefining marriage in a way that denies its essential meaning, or racist
behavior, a voter may legitimately disqualify a candidate from receiving support. But what if you can find no candidate that meets the standards of Catholic social teaching?

Here I will quote directly from the bishop’s teaching in Faithful Citizenship. (Paragraph 35. & 36.)

35. 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.

36. 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.

Again, I need to emphasize that in this short reflection I only skimmed the surface from the excellent and information-packed document from the magisterium of the Catholic Church. I recommend that you take the time to read the 24 pages of this document. I also recommend that you read and meditate on the scriptures. Of particular note is Matthew 25: 31-46 which is Jesus’ teaching on how God will judge at the end of time. The rewards you will receive is knowing that you have done your best in your duty as a Catholic Christian and that you have made the effort to inform your conscience in a way that may bring you some measure of personal peace in an otherwise chaotic time in the civic life of our nation. In any event voting your conscience will be better than being forced to eat pork.