



October 30, 2012

My brothers and sisters in Christ,

With Election Day now a week away, I take this final opportunity to urge you all to vote in these very important national elections. As I have communicated to you in columns, letters, homilies and statements over the past months, we as Catholics are confronted with grave challenges to our beliefs as baptized and confirmed members of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. Indeed, we know that we face serious threats to our very ability to practice and live our faith in our communities as full citizens.

We are first Catholics, not Democrats or Republicans, and recognizing our Catholic identity and the immutable truths of our faith, we must make the best decision we can according to our consciences, properly informed by the Church's official teaching. I know this can be difficult at times to discern, and I have sought in several ways to assist you, respectfully yet authoritatively, to make choices that do justice to the teachings of Our Lord and your status as His disciples in a darkened world. We must be strong, confident voices for truth and goodness in the public square, and this imperative includes the choices we make in electing our leaders.

The Church has made clear repeatedly our responsibility to take part in the political life of our nation: "In the Catholic Tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation. This obligation is rooted in our baptismal commitment to follow Jesus Christ and to bear Christian witness in all we do" (Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, para. 13). And while, as I have noted often, there are many issues that command our attention as Catholics, some challenges are so grave as to demand our focus, our serious reflection and our responsible decisions.

In the papal encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, written by Blessed John Paul II in 1995, the Holy Father affirmed the clear, age old teaching of the Church on abortion and underscored its high importance in the decisions Catholics make in the public square:

58. Among all the crimes which can be committed against life, procured abortion has characteristics making it particularly serious and deplorable. The Second Vatican Council defines abortion, together with infanticide, as an "unspeakable crime." . . .

61. . . . Christian Tradition...is clear and unanimous, from the beginning up to our own day, in describing abortion as a particularly grave moral disorder. . . .

62. . . . Therefore, by the authority which Christ conferred upon Peter and his Successors, in communion with the Bishops...I declare that direct abortion, that is, abortion willed as

an end or as a means, always constitutes a grave moral disorder, since it is the deliberate killing of an innocent human being. This doctrine is based upon the natural law and upon the written Word of God, is transmitted by the Church's Tradition and taught by the ordinary and universal Magisterium.

Abortion is no abstract topic or public policy issue without consequence in the present elections. The party platforms and political advertisements we see and hear each today confirm that the lives of the unborn, the weakest and most innocent amongst us, are still squarely in the public debate, and our votes do have consequences with respect to this “unspeakable crime,” both here at home and in nations abroad. If we do not defend life at its beginning at conception, then there is no life for us to develop and protect thereafter. It is the first right.

Finally, as I have attempted to make clear all year, the ability of the Church to live fully its mission as Christ’s Church is directly infringed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ mandate requiring Church institutions to provide insurance coverage for contraceptives, sterilizations and abortion-inducing drugs. To date, there has been no change, solution or accommodation to the policy announced in January, thereby forcing Church institutions, and indeed all Catholic business owners, to provide reproductive services that violate our conscience. The Church’s charitable, educational and healthcare ministries are and continue to be clearly threatened by this draconian requirement that assaults our First Amendment rights as free citizens. However an individual votes this November, that decision will have a specific impact on religious liberty, which is the first freedom.

As Catholics, we must recognize that the defense of religious liberty is necessary if we, as individuals and as a Church, are to preserve our ability to practice in our daily lives and in the public square all that we profess at Mass each Sunday. In the days ahead, please take a moment to visit our diocesan religious liberty webpage – www.arlingtondiocese.org/religiousliberty – where you can find all of my previous communications and other resources to help you. And, most importantly, I urge you to pray and have recourse to Our Lord and His Blessed Mother, especially under her title of “Mary, Help of Christians.”

Faithfully in the Heart of Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Paul S. Loverde". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Paul S. Loverde
Bishop of Arlington