Faithful Citizenship

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As a dutiful citizen of a country, one is required to partake in their civic duties. Citizenship is not just a passive status of membership. There are rights and protections established by countries or institutions and distributed to its citizens. The individual is required to follow the laws and interact within their society in such a manner that promotes the common good of the country as one entity.

In its literal sense, the word citizen refers to “an inhabitant of a city or town (3).” Citizenship plays a role in our spiritual lives, as well. We are ‘inhabitants’ of Christ’s Church; members of the body of Christ. As “citizens” of the Catholic church, we are commissioned to carry out our specific ‘civic duties.’ This asks of us to live our lives out in honesty, according to God’s laws. The Catechism of the Catholic church relays that:

“The human person participates in the light and power of the divine Spirit. By his reason, he is capable of understanding the order of things established by the Creator. By free will, he is capable of directing himself toward his true good. He finds his perfection ‘in seeking and loving what is true and good (CCC 1704).’”

One of our chief obligations is to pursue the truth. This quest is neither a loathsome one nor something to be balked at. It’s a lifelong and effort filled pursuit, but it’s fruitful. In fact, this is what we were created for, and our souls crave and are fulfilled by it. Truth should never be manipulated, even for the sake of a good cause. God’s justice and truth will always prevail. It’s not some idealistic notion, though. It requires work and sacrifice. We are to play a role in our world in a fashion that permits us to simultaneously adhere to the laws God has given us. This requires careful and thoughtful deliberation.

We are called to bring God’s salvation to others. Each member should view others, even strangers, as our friends in need of a genuine soul. In our current climate politics has become an idol, and a divisive one at that. Both sides of the political spectrum have embroiled and dedicated themselves to the politics of their parties, rather than the words of the Lord. Each party has fought with any means necessary, right or wrong. We are given clear and distinct instructions to carry out God’s will, not the will of a political party. Time and time again we are called to see the dignity and commonality between us and our brothers and sisters. Their dignity does not cease to exist when we disagree with them, no matter the severity. We are the instruments through which the Lord reaches others. Recognizing the human dignity in every person, as they are a reflection of God, is essential.

“By his reason, many recognize the voice of God which urges him to ‘do what is good and avoid what is evil.’ Everyone is obliged to follow this law, which makes itself heard in conscience and is fulfilled in the love of God and of neighbor. Living a moral life bears witness to the dignity of the person (CCC 1706).”

This call can be lived out in many different ways. We fight against every form of injustice perpetrated against the members of the body of Christ. In any situation where human dignity is assaulted or threatened, we are obligated to defend and seek truthful justice. As citizens we speak out against the violence of abortion; live against the tide of modern, secular culture; extend our gifts and compassion to those in less fortunate circumstances; work to end the tragedy of human trafficking; and fight against racial injustices. Working and speaking against these violations of the human person restores the beauty and dignity stolen from God’s precious creations. In all of these duties we are called to search further. We are to apply investigative and logical practices, rather than rely on our blind emotion. Our faith requires a balance. The polarization of these two sentiments results in a skewed and inaccurate perception of justice. We always seek what is true and good. We are one body; therefore, we view the difficulties others may be in as our own.

We are lucky to live in a country where our religious liberties are protected. It is something we must continue to defend and advocate for. Without these protections we would have no legal basis in our country to practice our religion. Our government provides us with the freedom of religion. According to the 1st amendment of the Constitution:

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances (2).”

While the United States does not have an official religion, and some of our fellow citizens may not share the same beliefs as us, we still have the right to live them out through this amendment. We should never be afraid to speak God’s truth, and especially not in a country where that is our constitutional right. The first amendment recognizes the necessity to guard individuals against the infringement of man-made alterations of faith. The Catholic faith was designed by God, and it was not meant to be rewritten or influenced by the perceptions of man at the current time. Faithful citizenship in Catholicism calls us to exercise this constitutional right in our everyday lives by bringing others to Christ and defending our faith.