



## **Living the Truth in Love**

### ***The Real Issues***

There are indeed many issues that need to be addressed before making a decision in the upcoming elections. Unfortunately there is a common opinion among the candidates for public office that the most important issue voters need to concentrate upon is the current state of the economy. This was recently well articulated by a candidate who said, "I cannot imagine anything more important to talk about than the economic crisis." This is a misleading position that draws focus away from other issues that are more important and may even be at the heart of the present economic crisis.

As important as it is to address the current economic situation, the most important issue is that of the respect for the dignity of all human life from the moment of conception until natural death. Every other matter, from abortion, euthanasia, the unnecessary application of the death penalty, unjust war, embryonic stem cell research, discrimination, immigration, poverty, homelessness, health care, the state of family life, to a fair and just economy for all, are related to the basic issue of the respect that is due to the dignity of life of every human person. In this context I cannot imagine anything more important about which to talk.

As we consider the issues before us in the upcoming elections, respect for human life must be seen as a priority. There are threshold issues and respect for life is primary among them. Among the issues pertaining to respect for life, there are also threshold issues. The right to the life of the unborn is one of them. When it is conceded, as it has sadly been through the decision of Roe v. Wade in our nation, that it is lawful to take the life of an innocent person through abortion, we are on the slippery slope of granting the state the complete power to determine whose life is useful and whose is not. We cannot grant the state the power to determine when the condition of a person's life becomes the criterion as to whether a person should live or die. To do so is also to grant to the state the ability to determine what degree of respect and dignity every person should receive according to his or her condition in life. In the upcoming elections, we have a grave moral obligation to support positions, agendas and legislation that protect and enhance the dignity of life at every stage. There is no greater issue than that of life, its protection and its enhancement.

It is important for us to realize that on the ballot in Florida this coming election is an extremely important proposed amendment that is directly related to the dignity of life. It is Amendment 2 to the State of Florida Constitution which states, "In as much as marriage is the legal union of only one man and one woman as husband and wife, no other legal union that is treated as marriage or the substantial equivalent thereof should be valid or recognized." This amendment to the State constitution affirms Florida's existing marriage law and protects marriage as currently defined by law from being overturned either by the legislative process or judicial ruling.

All of the Bishops of Florida strongly support Amendment 2 as it clearly affirms the

Church's teaching which defines marriage as a union ordered toward the good of husband and wife and the procreation and education of children. Support for this amendment is not motivated by discrimination toward any group and does not affect benefits contracted in the private sector. It is support for marriage, family life and the gift of life. It is support for the dignity and respect that is due to every human person who is meant to come into existence through the union of husband and wife. It is critical for us to support this amendment and to understand it in this context.

It is also important for us to realize that there is another piece of legislation which is not on the ballot for the upcoming elections but is being sponsored to come before Congress when it reconvenes in January. This is the so-called "Freedom of Choice Act" (FOCA). This is a horrendous bill which, if enacted as law, would establish abortion as a "fundamental right" throughout the nine months of pregnancy. It would prohibit public funding for any law or policy that would limit access to abortion such as laws of parental notification in the case of a minor and laws providing for informed consent. Partial-birth abortion would become legal on a national level and all citizens would be required to subsidize abortion through their tax dollars. FOCA would eliminate laws protecting the conscience rights of doctors, nurses and hospitals with moral objections to abortion. Also eliminated would be laws protecting women from unsafe abortion clinics and from abortion practitioners who are not physicians.

FOCA is anything but a "freedom of choice" and is an affront to anyone with a moral conscience. The fact that it is being sponsored and considered is incredible and is sign as to where the slippery slopes have taken us. Its ultimate passage would be a disaster, not only to the dignity of the unborn, but to the dignity of all Americans. Those sponsoring it deservedly should be questioned as to their fitness for holding their public office. Voters must beware. Once again,

we have a grave moral obligation to ensure that all is done so that FOCA be defeated and not become law.

As citizens of this great nation and as Catholics we have the right and obligation to study carefully all of the issues that are before us in the upcoming elections. Indeed, we have an obligation to do so and to vote in a manner that reflects a conscience formed according to the teaching of the Catholic Church. Since the right to life and the respect and dignity that must be afforded to every person are paramount, these must be considered in every decision we make. The economic situation in our nation is indeed critical but it is not the most critical issue before us.

Recently our Holy Father, Pope Benedict the XVI, opened the Synod of Bishops devoted to the Word of God. In his opening comments he made spontaneous remarks regarding the present economic situation that faces the entire world. He said, "We now see in the collapse of the great banks: money disappears, turns to nothing, and all the things, which seems like true reality on which we can count, are realities of a second order. One who builds his life on these realities, on objects, success, on everything that is visible, builds on sand. Only the Word of God is the foundation of every reality. . . . So we must change our concept of realism. . . . The realist is the one who builds his life on this foundation that remains permanently."

In the upcoming elections, as we consider all of the issues, let us be true realists and vote in a manner that builds our nation on a permanent foundation!

**Most Reverend Gerald M. Barbarito**

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