

*“Religious Faith in the Public Forum”*

As we prepare to celebrate the “Year of Faith” in our Church throughout the world, we are reminded of some tests of our Faith that exist in our very own country. Each of us are truly blessed to live in the United States of America, a country founded upon many freedoms which allow us to pursue the common goods of society. However, one of our most precious freedoms, **religious freedom, is being put to the fire**. We need to be active in our roles as both Catholic Christians and citizens of this great nation to protect this freedom. This is *more than a moral issue, it is a Constitutional issue*. Every Catholic citizen has a true responsibility to work in the political forum whether through serving in office or supporting those who serve our country. This can be done through active prayer and staying informed on issues that effect our ability to live as free citizens of this country; respecting its laws while following the Laws of God.

We sometimes hear, especially from politicians, that, “Yes, my faith is important to me, but my faith has no place in politics.” This is simply not true and contradicts what the Church teaches. It even more fundamentally contradicts the principles upon which the United States of America was founded. The *separation of Church and state* has long been an important element of the government of the United States, but its understanding and application has certainly been misconstrued and misinterpreted over recent years. It has become popular notion to believe that this ‘separation’ means God has no place in government or the life of the State. The problem with this is that if God has a place in the life of the State’s citizens, then it must also have some place in the political sphere which has been developed to protect its citizens and promote the common good. These of course include the fundamental rights of life and religious liberty.

The Church and State were never meant to be developed as exclusionary of each other, but in order to complement each other in their proper areas of expertise to build up the common good (life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness) most readily. Thus, the Church is supposed to have authority in what properly belongs to her; that is the moral life and interpretation of God’s Law in relation to civil law. The State is to be informed by this and work to build up its citizens by enacting laws which protect them. This is accomplished by carrying out judicial rulings and forming a society which helps to educate and ensure the safety of all citizens. The Church would have no right to one day teach all the faithful that following the laws of the United States is not important or that protecting the Constitution is irrelevant. In turn, the State has no right to dictate morality to those who freely practice a religion or to any citizen for that matter. In both cases, it is an overstepping of boundaries not seen by the Founding Fathers’ principles.

What does this mean for us? We should not be caught up in the notion that our faith does not play a role in the public forum. Holy Name School serves to teach its students that all things, academic and social, are influenced by our faith. Christianity is not just a religion, it is a way of life and must be part of that which we do each day. With important elections upcoming in our country we must work to form our consciences in order to vote, not just based on affiliations or parties, but upon tenets which coincide with our faith and its practice. Let us as Catholics have our voice and rights heard and respected, not only in our churches, but in the halls of our government of which we are faithful citizens.