

Acknowledgement of human dignity is the fundamental truth that animates our love for God and neighbor

31st Sunday in Ordinary Time

By: Fr. Daniel Condon, Diocesan Chancellor and Director of Legal Services

Today's gospel passage from Mark is the familiar account, found in each of the synoptic gospels, concerning the great commandments: first, the call to love the Lord our God with our heart, mind, soul, and strength and second to love our neighbor as ourselves. The Scribe recognizes, as I hope you do, that this truth resonates in the heart of those who are seeking holiness. As the Scribe acknowledges the impact of Jesus' teaching, Jesus affirms the Scribe's desire and the movement of the heart toward the kingdom of God. The last line of the account leads however to a confounding conclusion – "no one dared to ask him any more questions."

Perhaps some of you have taken advantage of the opportunity to cast your vote early, I certainly hope that the rest of us, who are able, will be exercising our civic responsibility and casting votes in those races that have candidates standing for elective office at the federal, state, and local level as well as on Proposal 1. This is one of the moments when we are well advised to seek guidance and to find some bit of wisdom that will help us to engage in this process with a greater sense of confidence that we are acting in an informed and conscientious manner.

We often have the sense that the love of God and neighbor is manifest in acts of piety and acts of service responding to specific human needs. However, we are also called to participate in the strengthening of the social bond, "to direct society to the pursuit of the common good, and with this purpose in mind, to persevere in consolidating its political and social order, its fabric of relations, its human goal." (Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, no.66)

The two great commandments acknowledged in the encounter of Jesus with the scribe are reflected in the themes of Catholic Social Teaching. It will be helpful to bring them to mind as we seek the wisdom of grace guiding us in this serious activity.

Our choices will be best informed when we remember these principles. 1) That human life is sacred, and that the dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. 2) That the way we organize our society directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community. 3) That human dignity can be protected, and a healthy community can be achieved only if human rights are protected, and responsibilities are met. 4) That we evaluate our society by acknowledging the way our most vulnerable members are treated. 5) That there is dignity in work and the right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, to organization and joining of unions, to private property, and to economic initiative that will serve all people. 6) That we are one human family whatever our differences. 7) That we are called to protect people and the planet and so demonstrate our respect for our Creator.

These principles are not enshrined in the platform of any single party and there is no perfect candidate. The outcomes desired will never be realized in a single administration or legislative assembly. We use these principles to guide our discernment when casting votes that will choose civil leaders and adopt initiatives that best express our hopes for society. My personal reading is that the acknowledgement of human dignity is the fundamental truth that animates our love for God and neighbor. It is the most basic

value that informs our understanding of the common good and our participation in the political enterprise. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us of the common good which presupposes all the conditions necessary for individuals and groups or persons to reach their fulfillment presupposes respect for the person, social well-being, and peace. These are the values that inform our conscience and guide our discernment as we consider whom we shall vote for and how we shall vote.