

Think and pray about your vote in upcoming election

by Bishop Thomas John Paprocki, Diocese of Springfield Illinois, 23 September 2012

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Much attention was given at the Democratic National Convention held recently in Charlotte, N.C., to the fact that all references to God had been purged from the draft version of the party platform. After outcries of protest from outside as well as within the Democratic Party, the sentence with the same reference to God used in 2008 was restored to read, "We need a government that stands up for the hopes, values and interests of working people, and gives everyone willing to work hard the chance to make the most of their God-given potential."

Before anyone relaxes and concludes that all is well now that the Democratic Party Platform contains a single passing reference to God, the way that this was done should give us pause. Convention chairman Antonio Villaraigosa had to call for the voice vote three times because each time the sound level for the "ayes" and the "nays" sounded about even, far short of the two-thirds necessary according to convention rules to amend the platform. That did not stop the convention chairman from declaring, "The ayes have it!"

What is troubling about that is the blatant disregard for the rules and for the apparent wishes of about half the delegates. The reference to God is back in the platform apparently because President Obama wanted it back in. That may be fine for now, but if a future president wants references to God taken out, apparently that can be done regardless of the wishes of the delegates if that is what The Leader wants. That does not bode well for democracy in the Democratic Party.

Even more troubling is that this whole discussion about God in the platform is a distraction from more disturbing matters that have been included in the platform. In 1992 Presidential candidate Bill Clinton famously said that abortion should be "safe, legal and rare." That was the party's official position until 2008. Apparently "rare" is so last century that it had to be dropped, because now the Democratic Party Platform says that abortion should be "safe and legal." Moreover the Democratic Party Platform supports the right to abortion "regardless of the ability to pay." Well, there are only three ways for that to happen: either taxpayers will be required to fund abortion, or insurance companies will be required to pay for them (as they are now required to pay for contraception), or hospitals will be forced to perform them for free.

Moreover, the Democratic Party Platform also supports same-sex marriage, recognizes that "gay rights are human rights," and calls for the repeal of the Defense of Marriage Act, the federal law signed by President Clinton in 1996 that defined marriage as the legal union of one man and one woman.

Now, why am I mentioning these matters in the Democratic Party Platform? There are many positive and beneficial planks in the Democratic Party Platform, but I am pointing out those that explicitly endorse intrinsic evils. My

job is not to tell you for whom you should vote. But I do have a duty to speak out on moral issues. I would be abdicating this duty if I remained silent out of fear of sounding "political" and didn't say anything about the morality of these issues. People of faith object to these platform positions that promote serious sins. I know that the Democratic Party's official "unequivocal" support for abortion is deeply troubling to pro-life Democrats.

So what about the Republicans? I have read the Republican Party Platform and there is nothing in it that supports or promotes an intrinsic evil or a serious sin. The Republican Party Platform does say that courts "should have the option of imposing the death penalty in capital murder cases." But the Catechism of the Catholic Church says (in paragraph 2267), "Assuming that the guilty party's identity and responsibility have been fully determined, the traditional teaching of the Church does not exclude recourse to the death penalty, if this is the only possible way of effectively defending human lives against the unjust aggressor. If, however, non-lethal means are sufficient to defend and protect people's safety from the aggressor, authority will limit itself to such means, as these are more in keeping with the concrete conditions of the common good and more in conformity to the dignity of the human person. Today, in fact, as a consequence of the possibilities which the state has for effectively preventing crime, by rendering one who has committed an offense incapable of doing harm — without definitely taking away from him the possibility of redeeming himself — the cases in which the execution of the offender is an absolute necessity are very rare, if not practically nonexistent."

One might argue for different methods in the platform to address the needs of the poor, to feed the hungry and to solve the challenges of immigration, but these are prudential judgments about the most effective means of achieving morally desirable ends, not intrinsic evils.

Certainly there are "pro-choice" Republicans who support abortion rights and "Log Cabin Republicans" who promote same-sex marriage, and they are equally as wrong as their Democratic counterparts. But these positions do not have the official support of their party.

Again, I am not telling you which party or which candidates to vote for or against, but I am saying that you need to think and pray very carefully about your vote, because a vote for a candidate who promotes actions or behaviors that are intrinsically evil and gravely sinful makes you morally complicit and places the eternal salvation of your own soul in serious jeopardy.

I pray that God will give you the wisdom and guidance to make the morally right choices.

May God give us this grace. Amen.