

Column101120

Companions on the Journey

October 11, 2020

Dear Friends,

We continue in Respect Life Month to address important issues that face us as Catholics especially in this presidential election year. Last week I highlighted the theme of life itself especially of those most vulnerable without a voice of their own. Namely, the unborn. The Right to Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness are guarantees in our Declaration of Independence. But this Right to Life undergirds the other two. And this Right to Life must include all if it is to be truly honored, respected and lived. The inclusion must extend to the children in the womb. Their right to life is primordial and primary. In Jesus' own words: See that you do not despise one of these little ones."

Jesus is not an advocate for us to despise any other person. He himself did not despise anyone. He did not despise Judas who betrayed him. He did not despise the Roman soldiers who crucified him nor those Jewish leaders who colluded in his death. But you and I know that right now in this country there is a lot of despising going on. "I hate him. I despise him. And all he stands for. I hate her and all that she does." Some who oppose capital punishment would definitely make an exception in certain circumstances. That is nothing of Christ's way in this attitude or approach. Jesus himself introduced a principle: we can hate the sin but we cannot hate the sinner. We are to love our enemies and not look down on them. Do good to those who hurt you. Respect the person even when you identify destructive decisions and acts that they perform.

I have been a priest for over forty-five years. I have heard a lot of confessions. In every age there have been parishioners whose hatred for a particular president has prompted them to make it a matter of confession. Their hatred was real. They truly despised the particular president whether Republican or Democrat. And they felt very strongly that they had grounds for their hatred and were justified in feeling the way they felt. There was no respect—none—for the person. As understandable as that may be, it is not the way of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus was no patsy. He could hold his own in difficult situations and when under attack, often personally. But Jesus does not respond in kind and neither can we.

I have heard it said from various places that this election and who we choose as president will either destroy our democratic institutions or destroy our country. Really? I don't know. There are very real, very significant issues on the table. No doubt. But it seems to me, the fate of our country is much more in the hands of us ordinary people than it is in the decisions of our next leader as important as that person is. The more people choose to live a moral and virtuous life, in the way of Jesus, then the future of our country is assured. But if we do not live such a life, if we give in to immoral thoughts, drives and compulsions, and recreations then our country will disintegrate no matter who the president is. Yes leadership is vitally important but so is followership, accountability, respect, and integrity.

I believe over one hundred and twenty million of us will cast a ballot by November 3rd. We will have prayed and discussed, debated, and argued. We will have shown a fierce conviction over what the issues are. Then we will vote. Each one gets only one. Each vote is important. Each vote is to be counted. Whoever is declared the winner in our electoral college will need the support not just of those who voted for him but of all of us. My friends, it is not the way of Jesus to give in to our hate and to choose to act to sow seeds of destruction because of our despising the winner. We can do better than that. We are to do better than that. We must do better than that. Let's put the hatred aside for a time and actually turn to our God in a spirit of trust. The Lord knows what is going on. He will make available to us all the graces we need to move forward. But it is up to us to choose to believe—despite our disagreements.

**In the peace of Christ,
Msgr. McHenry**