

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

I personally both subscribe to and endorse these “Personal Thoughts” of Archbishop Chaput. While I have not yet read the books and articles that he recommends, I intend to do so as I prepare myself prayerfully to exercise my greatest responsibility and awesome right as a citizen of our wonderful country which means so much to us, and so much to our much larger world. Like Archbishop Chaput, and so many of you, I find myself in a seemingly impossible dilemma in choosing between two candidates whom the Archbishop so generously refers to as “problematic”. I know that I need the guidance of the Holy Spirit in making this most basic decision as a responsible citizen of our great nation. The one thing I am sure of is that I cannot, even though it would be easier, withhold my vote. To do so would be an abdication of my civic responsibility and an affront to all those who have sacrificed their lives and their loved ones that I might have this precious right.

I ask you to join both Archbishop Chaput and myself in prayerfully informing your conscience and pray to God that we make the right choice for our nation and for the world. God help us all and God help the United States of America!

**Your brother in Christ,
Fr. Victor J. Eschbach
Pastor**

Please See Below



Some Personal Thoughts on the Months Ahead

Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap.

August 12, 2016

My column this week is a collection of personal comments. Read it as thoughts from a brother in the faith, not as teachings from an archbishop.

Presidential campaigns typically hit full stride after Labor Day in an election year. But 2016 is a year in which two prominent Catholics – a sitting vice president, and the next vice presidential nominee of his party -- both seem to publicly ignore or invent the content of their Catholic faith as they go along. And meanwhile, both candidates for the nation's top residence, the White House, have astonishing flaws.

This is depressing and liberating at the same time. Depressing, because it's proof of how polarized the nation has become. Liberating, because for the honest voter, it's much easier this year to ignore the routine tribal loyalty chants of both the Democratic and Republican camps. I've been a registered independent for a long time and never more happily so than in this election season. Both major candidates are – what's the right word? so *problematic* – that neither is clearly better than the other.

As Forbes magazine pointed out some months ago, the Republican candidate is worth roughly \$4.5 billion. The Democratic candidate is worth roughly \$45 million. Compare that with the average American household, which is worth about \$144,000. The median U.S. income is about \$56,000. Neither major candidate lives anywhere near the solar system where most Americans live, work and raise families. Nonetheless, we're asked to trust them.

That's a big ask. One candidate -- in the view of a lot of people -- is an eccentric businessman of defective ethics whose bombast and buffoonery make him inconceivable as president. And the other -- in the view of a lot of people -- should be under criminal indictment. The fact that she's not -- again, in the view of a lot of people -- proves Orwell's *Animal Farm* principle that "all animals are equal, but some are more equal than others."

So what are we to do this election cycle as *Catholic* voters? Note that by "Catholic," I mean people who take their faith seriously; people who actually believe what the Catholic faith holds to be true; people who place it first in their loyalty, thoughts and actions; people who submit their lives to Jesus Christ, to Scripture and to the guidance of the community of belief we know as the Church.

Anyone else who claims the Catholic label is simply fooling himself or herself -- and even more importantly, misleading others.

The American bishops offer valuable counsel in their document *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* (available from the USCCB), and this year especially, they ask us to pray before we vote. This is hardly new “news.” Prayer is always important. In a year when each Catholic voter must choose between deeply flawed options, prayer is essential. And prayer involves more than mumbling a Hail Mary before we pull the voting booth lever for someone we see as the lesser of two evils. Prayer is a conversation, an engagement of the soul with God. It involves listening for God’s voice and educating our consciences.

It’s absurd – in fact, it’s blasphemous – to assume that God prefers any political party in any election year. But God, by his nature, is *always* concerned with good and evil and the choices we make between the two. For Catholics, no political or social issue stands in isolation. But neither are all pressing issues equal in foundational importance or gravity. The right to life undergirds all other rights and all genuine social progress. It cannot be set aside or contextualized in the name of other “rights” or priorities without prostituting the whole idea of human dignity.

God created us with good brains. It follows that he will hold us accountable to *think deeply and clearly, rightly ordering the factors that guide us*, before we act politically. And yet modern American life, from its pervasive social media that too often resemble a mobocracy, to the relentless catechesis of consumption on our TVs, seems designed to do the opposite. It seems bent on turning us into opinionated and distracted cattle unable to gain mastery over our own appetites and thoughts. Thinking and praying require silence, and the only way we can get silence is by deciding to step back and unplug.

This year, a lot of good people will skip voting for president but vote for the “down ticket” names on their party’s ballot; or vote for a third party presidential candidate; or not vote at all; or find some mysterious calculus that will allow them to vote for one or the other of the major candidates. I don’t yet know which course I’ll personally choose. It’s a matter properly reserved for every citizen’s informed conscience.

But I do know a few of the things I’ll be reading between now and November. The list is not exclusive or comprehensive. But this year these particular titles seem especially urgent:

1. *Living the Gospel of Life*. This 1998 pastoral letter of the U.S. bishops remains the best brief guide to American Catholic political reflection yet produced.
2. *Resurrecting the Idea of a Christian Society* by R.R. Reno (Regnery) and *It's Dangerous to Believe: Religious Freedom and Its Enemies* by Mary Eberstadt (HarperCollins). Both of these books are new, important, a key to understanding the current moment in our national life, and deeply engaging. They need to be discussed and shared widely.
3. And finally two essays by the late, great Czech writer, Václav Havel, “Politics and Conscience” and “The Power of the Powerless.” Both are collected in *Open Letters: Selected Writings, 1965-1990* (Vintage Books). Havel was not (to my knowledge) a religious believer, and he wrote as a dissident

during an era of Soviet Bloc repression. But his commitment to what he called “living in the truth,” and his understanding and critique of the weaknesses in Western societies like our own – not just Marxist ones – were remarkable. They remain relevant *right now*, today.

The next few months will determine the next decade and more of our nation’s life. We need to be awake, we need to clear our heads of media noise, and we need to think quietly and carefully before we vote. None of us can afford to live the coming weeks on autopilot.