

Truth & the 2024 U.S. Election

Help for those in the Pulpit & the Classroom

Not an easy season to be preaching / teaching, is it?

Truth is hard to talk about even in "normal" times. No surprise that in the current climate it feels almost impossible. Yet "living truth" is the only way that we come to the light Christ promises (John 3:21) and, more than ever, we can't shy away from talking about what truth is and why it is important.

++++++

Tips to Help from *Let's Talk about Truth – Chapter 2*

Voting is an activity that falls into the realm of "judgment" and, hence, the material from Chapter 2 in the book will likely be helpful to you. Key points to bring up in the pulpit or classroom from this chapter:

Our judgments are shaped by the environments that we come out of (our family of origins, religion, economic class, language, culture, geography, gender, ethnicity, life experiences, etc...) From a Catholic perspective, not all judgments (in this case, exercised as votes), however, are "equally okay." It is simply not a question of "you do your thing and I'll do mine." We actually do think that some judgments are better than others. How do we assess the "goodness" of a judgment, including the voting booth?

1) A "good vote" is "grounded in reality" – in essence, the facts that you are drawing upon to help you make your mind up around something are real facts.... Not made up numbers or ungrounded assertions. Implication: during this season make sure that you are getting your information from solid sources committed to accurate reporting. If those in your pews or your classroom are unsure how to determine the quality of a source, invite them to check out Ad Fontes Media (adfontesmedia.com) or Media Bias/Fact Check (mediabiasfactcheck.com).

2) A "good vote" is guided by a well-formed conscience – In every decision that we made, we are striving for a decision that will lead to the greatest "abundance of life" (John 10:10) not just for ourselves, but for our planet at large. This is what we call "the common good"....or we could just call "the good." How "the good" is achieved is a matter of debate even among people of good-will. And ultimately, from a Catholic perspective, each of us is obligated to follow our own conscience about what will lead to the greatest good. But we are equally obligated to inform that conscience, feeding it with the wisdom acquired by generations past. As Catholics that includes the reading of scripture and church teaching. Each of us need to humbly put ourselves into dialogue with these sources and listen to them with open hearts, willing to be educated and even converted if there is a greater good available to us.

3) A "good vote" demonstrates concern for the impact it has on others—This marker of a good judgment could fall under "conscience" but deserves to be lifted up in a special way from a Catholic perspective. When we say the "good" we are shooting for is "common," we are acknowledging that we do not function as Lone Rangers in the world. Our judgments have impact on others and to make a good judgment, we need to make sure we listen to the voices of those who'd be impacted by our choice.

See pp. 61-67 of *Let's Talk about Truth* for a deeper dive into each of these three points.

Tips to Help from *Let's Talk about Truth* – Chapter 3

When voting for an elected official, we are ultimately not voting on issues, but on an individual. We are making a prudential judgment about whether a particular person not only shares a commitment to “the good” but whether they have the competency and character to effectively move forward “the good.” As Bishop Robert McElroy noted in his talk “Conscience, Candidates and Discipleship in Voting,” given February 6, 2020:

“ [B]ecause our nation is in a moment of political division and degradation in its public life, character represents a particularly compelling criterion for faithful voting in 2020. In the United States, political leaders, especially at the highest levels, imprint their character in pivotal ways upon the entire political culture, and thus on society itself. Today, leaders in government embrace corrosive tactics and language, fostering division rather than unity. The notion of truth itself has lost its footing in our public debate... For all these reasons, character is an even more essential element in effective faith-filled voting at the present moment, and another reason why faith-filled voting cannot be simply reduced to a series of competing social justice teachings. In the end, it is the candidate who is on the ballot, not a specific issue.”¹

Chapter 3 from *Let's Talk About Truth* considers why one cannot care about truth without also caring about truthfulness. Key points include:

- St. Thomas Aquinas names truth as having a mind aligned with reality; truthfulness is having a mouth aligned with one's mind.
- It is possible to be incredibly honest / straightforward / “tell it as I see it” (i.e. having a mouth aligned with one's mind), but not have a mind that is aligned with reality. In Thomas' writing, this qualifies as being in a state of error. Being in a state of error can be very dangerous. For example, I—in all honesty—may not believe in gravity, but if I step out of window of a tall building, I'm going to hit the ground as quickly as someone who does. I have an obligation to try to make sure my brain is aligned with reality. And if others consistently point out to me places where my brain is not aligned with reality and I refuse to listen, this error moves into the category of sin (CCC #1791 – “*This ignorance can often be imputed to personal responsibility. This is the case when a man 'takes little trouble to find out what is true and good, or when conscience is by degrees almost blinded through the habit of committing sin.'* In such cases, the person is culpable for the evil he commits.”)
- It is also possible to have a mind aligned with reality, but say other things out of one's mouth. In Thomas' writing this is what qualifies as lying. Lying is regarded as an intrinsic evil. (CCC# 2483—“*Lying is the most direct offense against the truth. To lie is to speak or act against the truth in order to lead someone into error. By injuring man's relation to truth and to his neighbor, a lie offends against the fundamental relation of man and of his word to the Lord.*”

¹ A full copy of Bishop McElroy's talk, originally given at the Harpst Center for Catholic Thought and Culture at the University of San Diego, can be found at: <https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/bishop-mcelroy-voting-faith-and-conscience>

- A society cannot go on existing if at a very fundamental level persons cannot believe that what their leaders and fellow citizens are telling them is true to the best of their knowledge. Every day is made up of a thousand acts of trust in others' words.

See pgs. 93-99 and 111-118 for a deeper exploration of truthfulness as the basis of character and necessary for the existence of society.

Tips to Help from *Let's Talk about Truth – Chapter 4*

At the end of this election, we are all going to need to go on living with one another, and that includes people who voted differently than we did. The ongoing healing of our society is going to depend on our capacity to "be true" to one another even when we do not hold the same "truths."

Key points that could be lifted up from Chapter 4:

- The Hebrew word for truth "emet" can also be translated "fidelity" or "permanence." Throughout the Hebrew scriptures, truth is stable, trustworthy. You can count on truth. God is emet. Torah is emet. A husband or wife is emet. We are challenged not just to seek truth in our judgments or be truthful in our speech, but figure out how to be true to relationships that mean the most to us.
- Being true does not require that we always agree with one another. Perhaps instead we work on common service projects with one another; pray for one another; etc...

For a deeper exploration of the ancient biblical sense of truth and ways of "being true" even when disagreeing, see pp. 131-151 in *Let's Talk about Truth*.

+++++

Yes, this is a tough time! But, Preachers and Teachers, know how much I (and all those in the pews and classrooms!) appreciate what you are doing to get us through this season. Thanks for each and every efforts you are making to articulate why truth matters in this election...and each and every day of our lives!

Your sister in Christ,

Ann Garrido