

How to Untangle the Web of Politics to Decide How to Vote

As Christians, we can turn to the Holy Spirit to guide us in deciding how to vote in elections. There are usually hidden agendas, issues we don't know about, and propaganda that can influence us into voting for the wrong ones. We want to vote well, but we're bombarded by too many opinions, advertisements, and even fears.

We can't see the future that will be created by political candidates after they take over the office that we vote them into, but God does. It's crucially important that we turn to the Holy Spirit for guidance, whether it's in a national presidential race or a local school board election and every other opportunity to vote.

"Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7)

Discernment is a gift of the Holy Spirit (see 1 Corinthians 12:10). The Letter to the Hebrews mentions it as an expectation of mature Christians "who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil" (Hebrews 5:14).

Saint Paul wrote, "I pray that your love may abound more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is best, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ" (Philippians 1:9-10). Did you catch the implications of voting wrongly? If we don't use the gift of discernment that's offered us by the Holy Spirit, we will be blamed for the evil! Oh my! We are each held accountable for the evils that result from voting for the wrong politicians.

Rarely is a politician fully a good choice, but

this does not mean that God stays out of political decisions.

He knows which candidates are best. He wants to have a voice in the political scene. He cares.



Here are seven important questions to consider. Pray first. Become sensitive to what the Holy Spirit is telling you as you read through these discernment points.

1. Does the candidate show any signs of understanding what it means to serve as a leader? To figure this out, ask: Does the candidate show evidence of caring genuinely about others? Or is he/she more focused on themselves and their own agendas?

Jesus said, "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but really are vicious wolves." (Matthew 7:15)

2. What are the fruits of the candidate's life? This means every clue about their moral life: marriage fidelity, respect for life, words that show caring, how they handle conflicts, etc.

"You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles. Every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree produces bad fruit." (Matthew 7:16-17)

3. Is the candidate "telling it like it is" because he/she is standing up for Truth? Or is he/she really only trying to use words to win votes? Many voters are duped into following a wolf who's pretending to be a shepherd, because they are frustrated and angry that what needs to change has not changed yet. Is the candidate winning votes by getting an emotional

reaction, speaking words that trigger the frustrations and fears of voters, rather than by standing strong on a platform for change, or does he/she have a history for making positive improvements in society?

A good leader speaks less and does more. A bad leader uses words as weapons.

"The tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! ... The tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity.... It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell." (James 3:5-6)

4. Turn off the sound and "listen" to the facial expressions. The best way to protect yourself from being deceived by a candidate's tongue is to silence the voice. The sound of the voice is very distracting. Mute it and watch his/her face and other body language. Do you see hatred or concern, self-centeredness or servanthood, sincerity or lies?

"They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good." (Titus 1:16)

5. Does the candidate put others down or lift them up? Perhaps we secretly (or even overtly) enjoy feeling superior over others, and when a political candidate behaves the same way, we feel a camaraderie with him/her, increasing the likelihood that we will cast our vote for him/her. Aside from our own need to grow in humility and repent from lording it over others, we need to ask: Is the candidate capable of and interested in truly serving *all* citizens under his/her jurisdiction? The candidate who puts others down is picking a fight; do we want to accept the wars that will result from this? The candidate who lifts others up is striving to build bridges and a culture of peace.

"Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them — not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock." (1 Peter 5:2-3)

6. Does the candidate care equally about all persons or is he/she prejudiced? To be able to discern this correctly, we need to first consider our own prejudices and repent from any opinions that claim that others are less important to God, less valuable, less human than we are. Whether they are immigrants seeking a better life, or unborn children, or criminals in jail, we are to not to judge anyone. A political candidate who freely judges and condemns is usurping the role of God; he/she is capable of treating you the same way. A good leader respects the due process of a healthy legal system for handling alleged criminals, promotes equality, and respects life at all its stages from the human fetus to the elderly and the disabled.

"Let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister." (Romans 14:13)

7. Does the candidate have a heart for diplomacy? Is he/she a peace-maker, or does he/she talk about it only for show, to please voters, rather than with a genuine concern for wanting what's best for everyone? We live in a dangerous world, because it is so full of hatred from terrorists, warmongers, and violent governments. We need a leader who can stand up to the bullies without triggering greater violence from them. A leader who shows no diplomacy during candidacy will certainly not handle enemies with the diplomacy that's needed to reduce violence and protect us.

"They have not known the path of peace, and there is no justice in their ways. They have made their roads crooked; no one who walks on them will know peace. Therefore, justice is far from us, and righteousness does not reach us. We look for light, but all is darkness; for brightness, but we walk in gloom." (Isaiah 59:8-9)

Let us pray that the Holy Spirit will guide our decisions and influence the decisions of other voters.