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**RESPECT FOR LIFE AND THE DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN  
PERSON IN CATHOLIC THINKING**

*While I was visiting my mom in Georgia, my mom's husband's son vented about their experience of church and politics as we drove in the car (they had gone to churches of various Protestant denominations over the years), "Well, we went to a "\_\_\_\_" church for a while until we realized that they were trying to make us vote Republican!" and so then we went to the "\_\_\_\_" church until we realized that they were trying to make us vote Democratic!" I said nothing. Little did I have the heart to tell him that Catholics get everybody mad, not just one political party. They are pushing issues that make people who follow both parties mad! We make everybody mad because we have so many opinions!*

But it's good to be Catholic and know that we don't discriminate: We make everybody from every political stripe mad!

But seriously, one of the things that I am most proud of, as a Catholic, and one of the things that most underlines why I think that God is truly working in a mighty way through the Catholic Christian community in our own time, is that we **DO NOT PANDER TO ONE POLITICAL GROUP AND THAT OUR POSITIONS ARE MARKED BY A REAL INTEGRITY THAT IS NOT SULLIED BY POLITICAL INTERESTS.**

Reminds me of an article by a Mr. Tom Krattenmaker in the Jan. 3, 2011 edition of USA TODAY entitled, "Give it up for the Catholics." He writes:

*When it comes to politics, you can often judge the integrity of people and organizations by their willingness to say or do the inconvenient thing. Give credit to the Catholics on that score — just after they say something that is very much in line with political conservatives, the bishops go and say something that sounds positively liberal. So they will talk about abortion or stem cell research and then go on about the death penalty or helping the poor or supporting letting children of undocumented immigrants get college grants, etc.*

He writes:

*“In terms of being pro-life, give the Catholics credit for promoting sanctity-of-life principle all along the chain of human life — from “womb to tomb,” as the saying goes — and to all manner of people, from death-row prisoners to collateral victims of war in enemy countries....”*

Catholics, he said, have integrity because they are willing to stand for a consistent set of beliefs even if they kind of make everyone a little mad.

And as our new Archbishop William Lori said on “The World Over Live” on May 25, 2012, as he and Cardinal Wuerl spoke on the issue of religious freedom in our society, “We are not here to tell people to be Democrats or Republicans or Independents...(Indeed, we have positions all over the spectrum)...For example, the U.S. Church supports Universal Health Care in this country.” He said this to underline that while some might say that the Bishops were “pandering” to traditional issues only, that they, actually, were hitting the whole gambut of them.

Indeed, while the bishops speak out loudly about abortion and respect for life in our society, as well as the freedom of Catholic institutions to not pay for contraceptives or abortifacents for their employees... they also have been speaking loudly on other issues, like respect for the needs of the poor and the immigrant... For example, in May of 2012, the U.S. Bishops, as a body, loudly criticized proposed cuts in services to the poor in our country, saying,

*“The Catholic bishops of the United States recognize the serious deficits our country faces, and we acknowledge that Congress must make difficult decisions about how to allocate burdens and sacrifices and balance resources and needs,” Bishop Blaire added. “However, deficit reduction and fiscal responsibility efforts must protect and not undermine the needs of poor and vulnerable people. The proposed cuts to programs in the budget reconciliation fail this basic moral test.”*

All of this reminds me of the Catholic view on respect for life at all it’s stages, and the dignity of all men women and children.

The Catholic view is one that is based on the conviction that all men, women and children (born and unborn) have value, and that we need to be vigilant in protecting their right to live AND their right to live lives marked by dignity and access to basic human needs for themselves and their families.

- **This means that we are against abortion:** Each of us need to figure out

how we can best help to work on this issue, but each of us need to take this issue seriously. Maybe we support alternatives to abortion through supporting pregnancy centers Or maybe write letters or email your opinions or participate in a “40 Days for Life” program or to join in the national March for Life (January) or the Maryland March for Life in the month of March, or programs to help people in crisis pregnancies or educating people about how unborn children develop very quickly.....indeed that an unborn child has a heartbeat at 18 days after conception.

- **Catholics also oppose the death penalty unless there is no other alternative to stop an individual from engaging in harmful actions** (that is, if we lived in the Wild West and there was no viable law enforcement system, or way to incarcerate someone, we could use the death penalty. Otherwise no.
- **Catholics oppose the use of stem cells gotten from an unborn child,** which is often called a fetus. They are okay with using ADULT STEM CELLS or the stem cells from a baby’s PLACENTA. Interestingly, for all the hype about using fetal stem cells for research, ALL, and I mean ALL of the breakthroughs in research that have happened in the last two decades of research using stem cells have happened with ADULT and PLACENTA stem cells....The FETAL cells have only caused problems and have not resulted in even the smallest bit of progress in dealing with any degenerative conditions or diseases. So we don’t have to choose between a person with MS or stem cell research. The only viable stem cell research that is producing any results is already approved by the Catholic Church.
- **Health Care:** Of course, while we are at it, pro-life certainly does entail, ultimately, a lot of issues: Because we care about the life of a child AFTER they are born too, so we need to build up a society where children and their mothers ALL have access to adequate health care.
- **And there are other end-of-life issues which are covered in more detail in another document under “Catholic Teaching” on our parish website, which is called, “Making Moral Decisions as a Catholic.”**

And we need to be mindful of how our economic decisions affect families around the globe....and to concern ourselves with those children who live in the midst of violence or poverty or don’t have access to clean water or health care or shelter or food around the world. And the Church also supports the rights of parents in families to become migrants to leave nations where they are unsafe or unable to provide for their families, even if that means breaking the laws of countries where they go if that is what they have to do to provide food and safety to their

families – even as they assert that nations have a right to protect their borders and to have law and order and not chaos which could insue with one nation overwhelming another with migrating people.

Talk about upsetting everybody!!! But that's what Catholics do. We hold a lot of strong positions which sometimes causes people to say that we are dogmatic or pushy, but really we're just EMPHATIC and CONSISTENT.

BUT, we have a consistent view that covers all of the decisions our society makes about people....and that view is always guided by seeing human life as sacred, and seeing that all men, women and children are treated with respect and love, all those born and unborn.

We also, by the way, promote that those men and women who have been involved in an abortion decision are LOVED BY GOD and that WE LOVE THEM and we have all kinds of programs designed to support them. Just google RACHEL'S VINEYARD, BALTIMORE.

Anyway, as one thinks about the **RESPECT FOR LIFE AND THE DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON IN CATHOLIC THINKING**, I am happy to say that our Church holds a consistent view on the many big issues facing our society based on their strong love for humankind and belief in the sacredness of life, that God loves us too....

You may disagree with the Church on an issue or two, but I am proud that the Church is CONSISTENT. And as Tom Krattenmeyer, a non-Catholic, wrote in the Jan. 3 edition of USA TODAY, that is the mark of an organization that has integrity.

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