



NETWORK ADVOCATES FOR CATHOLIC SOCIAL JUSTICE

Joy of the Gospel Reflection Starters

These *Joy of the Gospel* reflection starters are meant to be a springboard for **preaching** and **teaching** in your community before the November election!

This resource is meant to be used in conjunction with our “Voting Quote Bank” (www.networklobby.org/vote)—highlighting statements from Pope Francis as well as other faith and civic leaders on the power of voting.

Voting as an Act of Hope

Tuning in during the campaign season can be overwhelming at times. Interest groups flood our airwaves, and big money often dominates narratives with narrow messaging. In his first apostolic exhortation, *Joy of the Gospel* Pope Francis captures these feelings of despair in the wake of political partisanship.

“Conflict cannot be ignored or concealed. It has to be faced. But if we remain trapped in conflict, we lose our perspective, our horizons shrink and reality itself begins to fall apart. In the midst of conflict, we lose our sense of the profound unity of reality” (Joy of the Gospel 226).

However, Pope Francis reminds us of how essential hope is, and where the ultimate outcome originates—our God. This sense of hope opens our hearts and minds to new possibilities, new potential. It reawakens our individual power to shape the world around us.

“Although the life of a person is in a land full of thorns and weeds, there is always a space in which the good seed can grow. You have to trust God.”

Pope Francis reminds us to be an active participant and fulfill our civic duties.

“Jesus teaches us another way: Go out. Go out and share your testimony, go out and interact with your brothers {and sisters}, go out and share, go out and ask. Become the Word in body as well as spirit.”

As people of faith, voting is one part of our commitment to that testimony. Voting gives us the power to express that deep hope for a better and more just society. Hope orients our hearts to active participation in society and world, knowing that when we do our part it opens the way for God to do more. Voting gives each of us that chance to shape our government and political system.

Reflection Questions

What stories of Jesus remind you of hope and justice?

What does a “healthy democracy” look like for your own community?

What policy successes can you point to at the local level that remind you of the positive impact voting and elections can bring?

What can people in your community do to inspire hope amidst a partisan political environment?

Voting is sacred:

As people of faith, we can begin to understand our right to vote as more than just a privilege to be protected and cherished by its constant practice. As Fr. Ted Hesburgh, former President of the University of Notre Dame, put it,

“voting is a civic sacrament.”

Sacraments are outward, living signs of God’s grace. In this case, that grace is a deeply held hope that God can use our thoughtful and intentional votes to transform our society to more closely align with Divine vision. In the upcoming elections, we can find new hope by voting for candidates who will help bring about a more just and equitable society.

Pope Francis reminds us once again of the sacred duty to take action, to speak up.

“The Church which ‘goes forth’ is a community of missionary disciples who take the first step, who are involved and supportive, who bear fruit and rejoice. An evangelizing community knows that the Lord has taken the initiative, he has loved us first, and therefore we can move forward, boldly take the initiative, go out to others, seek those who have fallen away, stand at the crossroads and welcome the outcast...Let us try a little harder to take the first step and to become involved”(24).

Reflection Questions

As a community of faith, what does it mean to approach voting as a *sacred* act?

Within your faith community, how can the concept of “voting is a civic sacrament” motivate folks to get to the polls by November 4th?

“Gospel Joy”:

As people of faith, we can find great joy in casting a vote. Joy is the focus of Pope Francis’s apostolic exhortation *Joy of the Gospel*. In the opening paragraphs, Pope Francis draws attention to the many moments of joy present in the life and ministry of Jesus.

Pope Francis wants people of faith to remember that this joy is not confined to the words and text of the Bible; it is a lived experience. Gospel joy, he argues, is different from the empty pleasures of consumerism and an economy of exclusion, which leaves

“no room for others, no place for the poor” (2).

“I realize of course that joy is not expressed the same way at all times in life, especially at moments of great difficulty. Joy adapts and changes, but it always endures, even as a flicker of light born of our personal certainty that, when everything is said and done, we are infinitely loved”(6)

Our current political system does not serve all of our brothers and sisters, but we can find Gospel joy by aligning ourselves with people living in poverty and people who are marginalized as we cast our vote. We can find Gospel joy in ensuring people living at the margins have the opportunity to participate in our democracy.

Reflection Questions

Where in your faith tradition can you find sources of great joy related to speaking out for justice and engaging in the public square?

In a political climate filled with negativity, what are some way that your community can transform voting into an act of faith-filled, joyful celebration?

The Radical Revolution of Values in the U.S.

In 1967 Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King addressed the public at the Riverside Church in New York, and called for a “radical revolution of values,” shifting from “a thing-oriented society to a person-oriented society.” Decades later, Pope Francis echoes Dr. King’s sentiment in his’ *Joy of the Gospel*, calling on us all to develop,

“a spiritual taste for being close to people’s lives,” (268) and to get away from “personal or communal niches which shelter us from the maelstrom of human misfortune” (270).

Pope Francis reminds us that

“we have to state, without mincing words, that there is an inseparable bond between our faith and the poor” (48) and that the “radical call of our faith traditions is rooted in real lived experiences of the people.” “May we never abandon them” (48).

We all face similar calls to such a radical revolution within our current society, and we can shape a national revolution of values in the ballot box.

We can take our faith-filled values of equity and justice to the polls and vote for candidates who promote a person-oriented politics. In the ballot box, we are charged with a legacy of continuing the U.S.’s revolutionary history by proving Thomas Jefferson right—It is through “the peaceable exercise of our elective rights” that people can change the course of politics and begin a national radical revolution of values.

Reflection Questions

In what ways does your faith tradition make a radical call for you to support and consider all of our brothers and sisters when voting?

How can you influence others in your faith community to seriously consider a radically compassionate approach to voting?