

**For The Bulletin Of  
February 14, 2016**

**THE FIRST SUNDAY OF  
LENT**

*From Father Robert*

It so happens that this year the First Sunday of Lent falls on Valentine's Day. What a contradiction! During the season when we practice self-discipline, this day promotes self-indulgence. At a time when we remember God's forgiveness and mercy for our wrongdoings, this day seems to forget about the challenge and hard work of growing in relationships. For six weeks we look to the God of love to teach us self-giving, while this day tends to extol a gooey kind of love fed by insipid platitudes. Lent reminds us of our failings and need for conversion; Valentine's Day overlooks human imperfection and glorifies any kind of relationship. On the other hand, the coincidence of this Sunday with Valentine's Day is a happy event, as well. Both are about who we are, how we want to be in relation to others, and the importance of personal encounter for our very well-being.

In today's gospel, the encounter of Jesus with "the devil" parallels our own encounters with "the devil." None of us – not even the God-Man – is exempt from temptation. By resisting the devil's temptations to act as "the Son of God," Jesus fully embraces His human identity. Jesus facing temptation witnesses to how fully He identifies with who we are as human beings. By resisting the devil's temptations to act against who God created us to be, we fully embrace our own human identity: graced beings created in the image of God. Jesus

chooses not to misuse His divine power, taking up the mission for which He was sent. He was not sent to lord it over us, but to use His divine power to lead us to saving wholeness and well-being. We choose not to act against the divine Life God has bestowed upon us, taking up the mission on which we have been sent. We continue Jesus' saving ministry, reaching out to others with the Good News that God is forgiving and merciful, ever calling us to deeper relationship.

Temptation is an occasion for showing that our lives are turned to God, in Whom we find our very identity and being. Like Jesus, temptations and our very resistance to them strengthen us in our choices for goodness and holiness. In making these choices we are continually choosing who we want to be: those who faithfully serve God by doing good for others – this is our life's mission. Temptations' lure to self-satisfaction is overcome by an even stronger lure: growth in holiness and transformation into being ever more beloved daughters and sons of God.

*Living The Paschal Mystery*

The ritual act of professing our faith during our Sunday liturgies is no substitution for living it in our daily lives. When we are tested by temptations, our faith is put to the test as well and we are faced with a choice of who we are and how we want to live. Lent is a time to examine our choices. Lent is a time to grow in who we are.

Just as God led Israel to a "Land flowing with milk and honey," so will God lead us to salvation if each of us "calls on the name of the Lord. For us, though, our desert is the demands of everyday living and our salvation is found on the cross.

Each day we take up our cross and lay down our life for the sake of others, we are building strength to resist temptation and come to greater well-being. Our simple acts of kindness are helping us resist temptation. Our doing well whatever the task at hand helps us resist temptation. Our complimenting another or offering a word of encouragement helps us resist temptation.

We don't have to go out into a desert to find temptation! But we do need God's nearness to resist it. And that God has promised us.

As we begin our Lenten journey, how will you hear and respond to the challenge of God's Word?

- The devil tempts me to...I am able to resist because...
- The misguided personal gain I am most tempted to pursue is...This makes me less human in that...
- I am most aware of God's gift of divine Life when...

***About Liturgy: The Creed, The Universal Prayer, and Baptism***

The General Intercessions we pray each week as a part of the Eucharist are a kind of practical continuation of the profession of faith already begun in the Creed. The name used now for this time of intense prayer that concludes the Liturgy of the Word is "The Universal Prayer" and this name suggests that this prayer, then, is a "profession" of our faithful relationship to God that spills over to faithful relationship with each other. It is a priestly prayer uttered by all those who have been baptized.

The format used for the Universal Prayer involved the baptized assembly in two

ways. First of all, the intercessions are brief – only given an announcement of a general intention that flows from the readings, particularly the gospel. The slight pause indicated by the ellipses is time for each of us to pray with all our heart. Thus, the first involvement is in genuine prayer for the needs of the church, the world, the less fortunate, and our own parish. Second, the Universal Prayer isn't finished when we respond "Amen" to the Presider's concluding collect. In fact, the prayer we pray during Eucharist is only the beginning of our responsibility to those for whom we pray. In this prayer we also make a commitment to actually die to self, that is, to get involved in helping God's reign become a reality in our world. This prayer is a commitment to faithfulness to doing good for others, a commitment of faithfulness to our baptismal promises.

During Lent, an intense time of preparation for the Elect and candidates preparing for the initiation sacraments, we add yet another intention for those whom we will receive into full communion with the church and who soon will be exercising their baptismal priesthood and praying the Universal Prayer with the entire parish community.

***First Readings During Lent*** – The Old Testament readings during Lent provide a thumbnail of salvation history and, because they have their own purpose, won't necessarily accord with the gospel. The Lectionary is instructing us in God's ways and mighty deeds in the first reading and asking for a faithful response in the gospels.

***About Liturgical Music: Music For The Lenten Season***

The General Instruction to the Roman Missal, No. 313 provides us with directives concerning music during the seasons of Advent and Lent. During Advent, musical instruments should be used with moderation. During Lent, instruments should be used only to support the singing of the assembly. These directives are applications of the principle of Progressive Solemnity. Some liturgical days and seasons call for musical exuberance, while other day and seasons call for musical restraint. Applying the principal of Progressive Solemnity allows the paschal mystery dynamic of the liturgical year – its built-in rhythm of not yet-already, of anticipation-celebration, of dying-rising, - to have a formative effect upon us. This rhythm is no inconsequential thing, for it is the very rhythm which marks our identity as Body of Christ and our daily living as faithful members of the church.

***The Rite of Sending***

During our 10:00 a.m. Eucharist today we will celebrate the Rite of Sending for **Tina Costanza**, who is a Candidate, and **Xochi Perez**, who is a Catechumen. After signing the Book of the Elect, we will formally “send” them to the Cathedral where at 4:00 p.m. this afternoon, they will be “elected” to receive the Sacraments of Initiation. Tina will be received into the church by a Profession of Faith, Confirmation, and First Eucharist at the 10:00 a.m. Eucharist on Palm Sunday and Xochi will be received into the church through the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and First Eucharist at the Great Vigil of Easter on Holy Saturday night. Please keep both of them in prayer as they prepare to take this next

major step in their respective faith journeys.

***The Bishop’s Appeal***

Next weekend, February 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>, we will participate in a diocesan-wide Commitment Sunday for this year’s Bishop’s Appeal. Please be prepared to bring your one-time contribution of \$60 and place it in the second collection. Our goal for this year is \$31,145.46. With every registered family participating, we will surely reach our goal and possibly even surpassing it. I am deeply grateful for your support for this annual appeal which enables the Diocese to fund programs and staffing that they would not otherwise be able to do.

***Our Lenten Brochure***

If you were not with us last weekend, there are additional copies of our Parish Lenten Brochure available on the credenza. The brochure contains the days and times of all our Lenten services and devotions, educational and spiritual opportunities, as well as the days and times of our Holy Week, Triduum, and Easter Day liturgies.

***Knights of Columbus Lenten Friday Fish Fry***

One of the great experiences of Lent at St. Ignatius of Antioch is coming to our Knights of Columbus Lenten Friday Fish Frys. The price could not be better for the delicious battered cod, French fries, and coleslaw. And, if you dine in, you also have the option of purchasing beer or wine. In addition, if you dine in, you can play “Lightening Bingo” with our one-and-only **Ron France**. Please be sure to see the bulletin for discount coupons that are good for every Friday in Lent. Bring your family, friends, and

neighbors. Serving begins at 4:00 p.m. and concludes at 7:00 p.m. All proceeds benefit our Knights charitable programs.

***Year of Mercy Evening of Reflection***  
**Francis, Bishop of Rome**, has asked that everywhere in the world March 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> be dedicated to “24 Hours With the Lord.” Here in our Deanery, we are offering an Evening of Reflection at Immaculate Heart of Mary Church, Brentwood, featuring **Msgr. Antonio Valdivia** who will give brief talks in both English and Spanish. The evening will also include readings from scripture and music in both English and Spanish. The Evening begins on Friday, March 4<sup>th</sup>, at 7:30 and will conclude at 9:00 p.m. All 8 parishes of our Deanery will participate. I hope you will join us.

***Lenten Communal Penance Liturgies***  
Please be sure to see the list of times and places for our annual Lenten Communal Penance Liturgies in the Lenten Brochure. The Communal Penance Liturgy will be offered here at St. Ignatius of Antioch on Thursday, March 17<sup>th</sup>, at 7:30 p.m. The priests of the Deanery will be present to assist with the hearing of confessions that evening. This is a wonderful way to experience God’s mercy and love personally as we encounter Him in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

***St. Joseph’s Dinner***  
Saturday, March 19<sup>th</sup>, is the Feast of St. Joseph and we will once again have our annual St. Joseph’s Day Dinner in the parish hall, following the Saturday Vigil Mass. Please watch the bulletin for all the details and ticket sales. This is always a SOLD OUT event! Don’t miss out on this wonderful celebration!

### ***Thank You***

...to all of our parishioner volunteers who do so much each week so make our parish the vibrant community of faith that we are:

...to those who cleaned the church last weekend: **Jun Bajet, Angela Bueno, Carole Miller, Mency Osborne, Rose Salamanca, and Steve Rojek.**

...to those who cleaned the bathrooms and maintained them through the week: **Robert Goncalves, Mary Ewing, Geri Abaya, and Harlan Young.**

...to the wonderful members of our Art and Environment Committee for once again creating a very beautiful, reverent, and appropriate environment for the Lenten Season: **Rich Confetti, Theresa Nelms, Don Benson, Jose Palomino, Pablo & Norma Villegas, Tom and Stevie Catchings, Denise Moss, Lorraine Lohmeier, Patricia Britton, Carole Miller, and Gail Burgarino.**

...to our **counting teams** who are here every week to count the weekly collections. Because of confidentiality, we do not disclose the names of the counting team members, but rest assured we are thankful for all that they do.

...to our volunteers who assisted in the parish office last week: **Mary Ng, Harlan Young, Karen Oliver, Barbara Jackson, Rowena Cayaban, Joe Fanfa and Bev Iacona.**

...to our St. Vincent de Paul and Mobile Mall volunteers who transported last week’s donations: **Bob Carvalho and Barbara Jackson.**

...to our faithful weekly bulletin collating team: **Bob Carvalho, Carole Miller, Dave Costanza, Judy Quicho, Vangie Parrilla, and Belen Farin.**

...to our facilities volunteers who assisted Rich Confetti: **Don Benson and Jose Palomino** (aka: RDJ).

### ***Knight News***

This past Saturday morning, four of our Knights received their Second Degree. Congratulations to **Vince Augusta, Bob Carvalho, Noel Fortez, and Amiel Laxamana**. Our Council is also planning a Third Degree Exemplification on Sunday, February 28<sup>th</sup>, beginning with a Light Lunch at 12:00 Noon and followed by the Degree Ceremony at 1:15 p.m.

### ***Super Bowl Pool Earns Money For The New Building Fund***

*(Submitted by Brian McCoy)*

Thanks to **Bob Plurkowski** for once again spearheading the Super Bowl Pool (even though the Chicago Bears were nowhere to be found . . . again) to raise money for our parish. Half of all entry fees were designated for the parish. The balance was used to fund the prizes. The four winners were **Jose Palomino** (1<sup>st</sup> quarter score), **Elisa Comacho** (2<sup>nd</sup> quarter) **Chip Sharpe** (3<sup>rd</sup> quarter) and **Father Robert** (4<sup>th</sup> quarter). A total of \$1,260 dollars was deposited into the Building Fund. Thanks to everyone who participated.

### ***Important Addendum to the 2015 Pastoral Report***

Our Grand Raffle traditionally represents the largest single fundraiser for the parish and 2015 was no exception. Unfortunately, when the report was prepared, the hard work of the Grand Raffle Committee was not included in the October summary. The parish is truly grateful for the work of the this committee – **Annette Romani (Chair), Chris Romani, Theresa Nelms, Crystal Stahl, Chip & Jane Sharpe, Carla Brayer and Kathleen Clarke**.

## **The Greatness of a Nation**

February 15, 2016, America, The Journal of the Society of Jesus in the United States

[Robert W. McElroy](#), Bishop of San Diego

“Reclaiming our national politics for the protection of the human person”

The contrast between the beautiful vision of politics that Pope Francis presented to the United States and the political campaigns that have unfolded in the past several months could not be more heartbreaking. In his address to Congress, Pope Francis began by comparing the fundamental responsibilities of America’s political leaders to the role of Moses, emphasizing that the first call of public service is “to protect by means of the law the image and likeness fashioned by God on every human face.”

Recalling the martyrdom of Abraham Lincoln, Francis pointed to the foundational role that freedom plays in U.S. society and politics and noted that “building a future of freedom requires love of the common good and cooperation in a spirit of subsidiarity and solidarity.” Citing the figure of Dorothy Day and her thirst for justice in the world, the pope emphatically demanded that the economic genius of the American nation must be complemented by an enduring recognition that all economies must serve justice comprehensively, with special care for the poor. Finally, invoking the legacy of Martin Luther King Jr., Pope Francis urged the nation’s political leaders to deepen America’s heritage as a land of dreams: “Dreams which lead to action, to participation, to commitment. Dreams which awaken what is deepest and truest in the life of a people.”

In Francis' message he made clear that the core of the vocation of public service, and of all politics, is to promote the integral development of every human person and of society as a whole. It is a vocation that requires special and self-sacrificial concern for the poor, the unborn, the vulnerable and the marginalized. It is a commitment to pursue the common good over that of interest groups or parties or self-aggrandizement. It is a profoundly spiritual and moral undertaking.

This same spiritual and moral identity is also emblazoned upon the most foundational act of citizenship in our society, that of voting for candidates for office. Thus, ultimately it is to the citizens of our nation as a whole that the challenge of Pope Francis is directed. Catholic teaching proclaims that voting is inherently an act of discipleship for the believer. But American political life increasingly creates a distorted culture that frames voting choices in destructive categories that rob them of their spiritual character and content.

It is for this reason that the central foundation for an ethic of discipleship in voting for the Catholic community in the United States today lies not in the embrace of any one issue or set of issues but rather in a process of spiritual and moral conversion about the very nature of politics itself.

### **A Spiritual Conversion to Solidarity**

Such a conversion requires deep self-scrutiny and reflection. It demands a rejection of the tribal element of politics that sees voting as the opportunity to advance the well-being of our race, our class, our religious community at the expense of others. It entails a purging of the inherent human tendency to allow anger and wedge issues to infect our voting choices. A spiritual conversion among voters demands that we reject

the increasing habit in our political culture of attributing all differences of opinion to ignorance or dishonesty. And such a spiritual conversion prohibits us from framing political choice in the United States as essentially a competition between two partisan teams, one good and one bad, with all the visceral enjoyment that such a competition brings.

Most important, a spiritual political conversion requires the orientation of soul that flows from the principle of solidarity that St. John Paul II powerfully outlined as a fundamental element of Catholic social teaching. This orientation reminds us that in society we must always understand ourselves to be bound together in God's grace and committed, in the words of "On Social Concerns," "to the good of one's neighbor, with the readiness, in the Gospel sense, to lose oneself for the sake of the other rather than exploiting him."

The implications of such a spiritual stance for discipleship in voting are clearly reflected in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*: "The principle of solidarity requires that men and women of our day cultivate a greater awareness that they are debtors of the society of which they have become a part."

Such a spiritual conversion to solidarity is not alien to the American political tradition. The founders of the United States called it civic virtue, and they believed that it was absolutely essential for the success of the new experiment in democracy that they were launching.

The founders generally believed that religious belief was one of the few foundations in the hearts of men and women that could produce enduring civic virtue and the self-sacrifice that at times it demands. It was their hope that

a culture of civic virtue would lead to a politics of the common good.

## **A Moral Conversion to the Common Good**

The core concept of the common good is simple. Rooted in the dignity, unity and equality of all people, the concrete common good is the set of social conditions at a given historical moment that will best allow all people in a society to attain their fulfillment as individuals and groups.

One of the greatest gifts of Catholic social teaching has been its reflection on the key elements that form the political common good in contemporary society. This reflection is anchored in an unswerving commitment to the transcendent dignity of the human person, the protection of human life, an abiding care for the poor and the marginalized, the protection of authentic human freedom and the promotion of peace.

It is particularly important to note five aspects of Catholic teaching about the nature and concrete embodiment of a nation's political common good in any particular historical moment:

1) The political common good of a nation embraces those elements of life in society that properly fall to the work of government.

2) The concrete political common good is dynamic. While the fundamental elements of Catholic moral teaching about the common good are enduring, the identity of the concrete common good that should guide citizens in voting is rooted in changing social structures, laws, socioeconomic challenges and historical events. Thus, for example, the political importance of immigration as a component of the common good is amplified at this time both because the world is today facing the most

monumental refugee crisis since World War II and because the political process of comprehensive immigration reform has come to a complete standstill. Similarly, the incompatibility of assisted suicide with the common good has greater political salience today because of the growth in efforts to legalize assisted suicide within the past five years.

3) Structural changes in society regularly produce new developments in Catholic doctrine designed to analyze the new moral realities that processes like industrialization, secularization, globalization and climate change have produced. In a very real sense, the history of modern Catholic social teaching is a history of the development of doctrine. From the contribution of Pope Leo XIII on the rights of labor to St. John XXIII on human rights; from the Second Vatican Council's "Declaration on Religious Freedom" to Pope Paul VI's doctrine of integral human development to St. John Paul II's theology of work; from Pope Benedict's seminal teachings on the stewardship of the environment to the writings of Pope Francis regarding extreme poverty, Catholic social teaching on the common good has been characterized by a fundamental continuity maintained through a substantial dynamism, never stasis.

4) Pope Benedict observed in "Charity in Truth" that "as society becomes ever more globalized, it makes us neighbors, but does not make us brothers." This penetrating insight deserves deep and sustained attention in our formulation of the concrete common good in 2016. The process of globalization has created new dimensions of the common good and new moral imperatives among nations precisely because the growing interpenetration of economic, political and cultural actions by powerful nations has enormous and sometimes very

destructive impacts on vulnerable states and economies. Pope Francis addressed this very reality when he urged the bishops of the United States to witness powerfully to America's necessary service to solidarity in the international system as a "nation whose vast material and spiritual, cultural and political, historical and human, scientific and technological resources impose significant moral responsibilities in a world which is seeking, confusedly and laboriously, new balances of peace, prosperity and integration."

5) Finally, and most important, Catholic teaching on the nature of the political common good is increasingly focused on the needs of those most vulnerable in society.

### **The Political Common Good**

During his address to the bishops of the United States, Pope Francis outlined the major issues that constitute the political common good in the United States at the present moment: "I encourage you, then, my brothers, to confront the challenging issues of our time. Ever present within them is life as gift and responsibility. The future freedom and dignity of our societies depends on how we face these challenges. The innocent victim of abortion, children who die of hunger or from bombings, immigrants who drown in the search for a better tomorrow, the elderly or the sick who are considered a burden, the victims of terrorism, war, violence and drug trafficking, the environment devastated by man's predatory relationship with nature...the family."

These are the elements that form the central moral claims that voters must weigh as they seek to approach their political responsibilities through a framework of discipleship. Hauntingly, Pope Francis advances these claims not as abstractions but with the human faces of the victims who suffer concretely from the failure of our society to

advance specific dimensions of the common good. As voters seeking to be disciples, we must maintain a focus in our political discernment on these very human faces, so as to inoculate ourselves against the powerful tendency in our culture to selectively minimize the power of any of these moral claims out of self-interest or partisanship, class or race.

The primary step of moral conversion to the common good requires an ever deeper affective understanding of how the commitment to the dignity of the human person radically embraces each of the issues that Pope Francis identified as constitutive of the common good of the United States at this moment in our history. It requires, in a very real sense, the development of "a Catholic political imagination" that sees the mutual linkages between poverty and the disintegration of families, war and the refugee crisis around the world, the economic burdens of the aging and our societal lurch toward euthanasia.

### **Setting Priorities**

A second step in the moral conversion to the common good for voting requires discernment about how Catholics should prioritize the major elements of the common good in the United States today. If immigration, abortion, poverty, religious liberty, the family, war and peace, the environment, the rights of workers, trafficking in drugs and assisted suicide all constitute central elements of the common good, which issues are pre-eminent?

Many widely circulated independent Catholic voter guides propose that the concept of intrinsic evil provides an automatic process for prioritizing the elements of the political common good in the United States.

The church teaches that certain acts are incapable of being ordered to God since



in their very structure they contradict the good of the person made in God's likeness. Such actions are termed "intrinsically evil" and are morally illicit no matter what the intention or circumstances surrounding them. Those who focus primarily on intrinsic evil make two distinct but related claims: 1) that the action of voting for candidates who seek to advance an intrinsic evil in society automatically involves the voter morally in that intrinsic evil in an illicit way; and 2) Catholic teaching demands that political opposition to intrinsically evil acts, like abortion, euthanasia and embryonic experimentation, must be given automatic priority over all other issues for the purposes of voting.

The recent statement of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship," shows why this argument is simplistic and thus misleading. The bishops' statement clearly asserts the absoluteness of the prohibitions against concrete intrinsically evil acts, emphasizing that no circumstances or intentions can justify performing or illicitly cooperating with such acts. At the same time, "Faithful Citizenship" recognizes that voting for a candidate whose policies may advance a particular intrinsic evil is not in itself an intrinsically evil act.

Voting for candidates is a complex moral action in which the voter must confront an entire array of competing candidates' positions in a single act of voting. It is crucial that in voting for a candidate who supports the advancement of an intrinsic evil, Catholic voters not have the intention of supporting that specific evil, since such an intention would involve them directly in the evil itself. But voters will often find themselves in situations where one candidate supports an intrinsically evil position, yet the alternative realistic candidates all

support even graver evils in the totality of their positions.

This is particularly true in the United States today. The list of intrinsic evils specified by Catholic teaching includes not only abortion, physician-assisted suicide and embryonic experimentation but also actions that exploit workers, create or perpetuate inhuman living conditions or advance racism. It is extremely difficult, and often completely impossible, to find candidates whose policies will not advance several of these evils in American life.

Even more important, a fatal shortcoming of the category of intrinsic evil as a foundation for prioritizing the major elements of the political common good lies in the fact that while the criterion of intrinsic evil identifies specific human acts that can never be justified, it is not a measure of the relative gravity of evil in human or political acts.

Some intrinsically evil acts are less gravely evil than other intrinsically evil actions. Intrinsically evil action can also be less gravely evil than other actions that do not fall under the category of intrinsic evil.

For example, telling any lie is intrinsically evil, while launching a major war is not. But it would be morally obtuse to propose that telling a minor lie to constituents should count more in the calculus of voting than a candidate's policy to go to war. It is the gravity of evil or good present in electoral choices that is primarily determinative of their objective moral character and their contribution to or detraction from the common good. Moreover, because voting is a complex moral action involving mitigating circumstances, a vote for a candidate who supports intrinsic evils often does not involve illicit cooperation in those

acts. For these reasons the category of intrinsic evil cannot provide a comprehensive moral roadmap for prioritizing the elements of the common good for voting.

### **The Four Pillars of Life**

A far better guide to prioritizing the major elements of the political common good of the United States lies in the intriguing words Pope Francis used in outlining those elements for the bishops of the United States: “I encourage you, then, my brothers, to confront the challenging issues of our time. Ever present within them is life as gift and responsibility.”

At this moment there are four pre-eminent political issues facing the United States that touch upon life as gift and responsibility in a decisive way.

The first is abortion. The direct destruction of more than one million human lives every year constitutes a grievous wound upon our national soul and the common good. It touches upon the very core of our understanding of life as gift and responsibility. As Pope Francis wrote in “Laudato Si’,” “How can we genuinely teach the importance of concern for other vulnerable beings, however troublesome or inconvenient they may be, if we fail to protect a human embryo, even when its presence is unwanted and creates difficulties. ‘If personal and social sensitivity toward the acceptance of the new life is lost, then other forms of acceptance that are valuable for society also wither away.’”

The second is poverty. In a world of incredible wealth, more than five million children die every year from hunger, poor sanitation and the lack of potable water. Millions more die from a lack of the most elementary medical care. In “The Joy of the Gospel,” Pope Francis wrote: “Just as the commandment ‘Thou shalt not kill’ sets a clear limit in order

to safeguard the value of human life, today we also have to say ‘thou shalt not’ to an economy of exclusion and inequality. Such an economy kills.” The United States is the most powerful economic actor in the world today, and even the most basic ethic of solidarity demands that it take dramatic steps to reform the international systems of trade, finance and development assistance in order to save lives in the poorest sections of the world. Moreover, inside the United States, the realities of exclusion and inequality created by poverty are growing, menacingly sapping the solidarity that is the foundation for our national identity and accentuating the fault lines of race and class. In the richest nation in human history, homeless people live on the streets, the seriously mentally ill are all too often left without effective care, and our prisons overflow with young men who are disproportionately poor and of color.

A third pre-eminent issue centering upon life as gift and responsibility is care of the earth, our common home. The progressive degradation of the global environment has created increased poverty and death among many of the poorest peoples on earth. Each year thousands of species are destroyed, lost forever to our children and to the earth’s future. Most chillingly of all, science has clearly established the existence of dramatic climate change produced by human action, a peril that threatens the very future of human existence. Pope Francis underscored the urgency of global action saying: “Every year the problems are getting worse. We are at the limits. If I may use a strong word, I would say that we are at the limits of suicide.”

The final pre-eminent question at stake in the political common good of the United States today is assisted suicide. For at its core, assisted suicide is the

bridgehead of a movement to reject the foundational understanding of life as gift and responsibility when confronting end-of-life issues. In 2015 the state legislature of California passed a bill legalizing assisted suicide but would not fund palliative care for the state's suffering poor at the end of their lives. Such is the "false sense of compassion" that Pope Francis has described as lying at the heart of the movement to spread assisted suicide. As with abortion, this movement corrodes society's responsibility to secure the health of its members as an integral component of the common good.

The underlying assault upon the notion of life as gift and responsibility embodied in these four issues marks them as the four central pillars of life for the election of 2016. Each of them reflects the "throwaway culture" that Pope Francis has identified as a central cancer of our modern world. The unborn child, the poor, the sick and the elderly are all disposable; even the very planet that is vital for the continuation of human life itself has become disposable.

### **A Sign and a Safeguard**

In his closing remarks to Congress and the American people, Pope Francis said: "A nation can be considered great when it defends liberty, as Lincoln did; when it fosters a culture that enables people to 'dream' of full rights for all their brothers and sisters, as Martin Luther King sought to do; when it strives for justice and the cause of the oppressed, as Dorothy Day did by her tireless work...." How different this understanding of national greatness is from the current political conversation in the United States!

Fifty years ago this past December, the fathers of the Second Vatican Council declared that the church embraces her role in the modern age of being "at once a sign and a safeguard of the

transcendent character of the human person." It is essential that every member of the church at all levels of leadership take up this responsibility to reclaim our national politics for the protection of the dignity of the human person and the advancement of the common good.

**Most Rev. Robert W. McElroy** is the bishop of San Diego.