

Guidance to a Public Servant in a Conflicted Society

Rick Santorum

He has served as a United States Senator from the state of Pennsylvania since 1995. While Senator Santorum is proud of his accomplishments as a public servant, he is most proud of his role as husband and father. Senator Santorum and his wife Karen are the parents of seven children.

Each of us must daily and prayerfully reflect on how we can serve God through the vocations to which he has called us. It is a challenge to think beyond our own desire to succeed, or to excel for personal recognition, and to ask the Lord how we may serve Him. We are called to live by the Spirit, not by our own will. In living our faith openly, we seek to share the charity of Christ.

By recognizing that we serve God through our vocations, we sanctify our work — no matter how the world may perceive that work. The work of the janitor and the CEO (Chief Executive Officer) honor Him equally. Christians should always look to Jesus and his life as an example, and see how he gave the same glory to his Father when he was pounding nails or sawing wood as when he was curing the sick and working miracles. When we look to the years of Jesus' hidden life in Nazareth, he teaches us the value of ordinary life as a means to holiness.

As Christians, we are challenged to live lives that are different. The Truth of the Gospel is revealed in how we live these truths — in our personal lives, in our marriages, in our families, in our work, and in society. Each of us is called to love and walk with Christ.

For many in this world, this walk with Christ must be in secret, as in nations where religious freedom is nonexistent — where publicly professing one's faith is to publicly ask for condemnation — or worse — much worse.

One would think that I, as an elected official in the United States Senate, would feel completely free to live out my Catholic faith. After all, the United States Constitution guarantees religious freedom. But over the last several decades, true religious freedom in the United States has been dampened by those

seeking to establish a single national religion — secularism. These are the people to whom religious expression is incompatible with civil society. They see a contradiction to which Blessed Josemaría responds:

“It is not true that there is opposition between being a good Catholic and serving civil society faithfully. In the same way there is no reason why the Church and the State should clash when they proceed with the lawful exercise of their respective authorities, in fulfillment of the mission God has entrusted to them”¹.

I hear these sentiments during debate on the floor of the Senate, especially when a law that touches on abortion is at hand. I have led the fight against a particularly brutal form of abortion that is perfectly legal in my country. Late-term pregnancies are terminated by partially delivering a baby, but leaving the head in the birth canal, inserting scissors at the base of the skull, and sucking the brains out of the baby before completing delivery. The United States Supreme Court has recently overturned state laws seeking to ban this abhorrent practice.

As you can imagine, as a Christian and as a Catholic, I am deeply affected by the implications of this debate, and the strong defense of this procedure. I am also roundly criticized for letting my personal faith get in the way of my public duty to protect women. My ‘zealotry’ is believed to blind me to the obvious boon abortion is to women’s rights.

The American pro-abortion movement does such a disservice to women, especially to young women and poor women. It is often too late before these women realize that they have been misled. That they have given the men in their lives a pass on responsibility. That they will forever ache for the children they never met. And that if given a second chance, their ‘choice’ would be different. But, I am said to be ‘anti-woman’ for saying such things. And I am said to be ‘a religious zealot’ for trying to impose my views on others.

In *The Way*, Blessed Josemaría writes, “Nonsectarianism. Neutrality. Old myths that always try to seem new. Have you ever stopped to think how absurd it is to leave one’s Catholicism aside on entering a university, a professional association, a cultural society, or Parliament, like a man leaving his hat at the door?”².

This is exactly what I, and others, are asked to do by American political, cultural, and academic elites. But this is not the real tragedy. The real tragedy is that this world view now permeates the American culture, even among many Christians. This moral relativism has become the predominant force in American society.

¹ *Furrow*, 301.

² *The Way*, 353.

Speaking as an American, and as a public figure, I am deeply troubled by this turn away from God. Americans have turned away from the roots of our democracy, and from God's role in its foundation. Our Founding Fathers sought to establish a nation based on the basic tenet that freedom and human dignity are divine rights given by God.

"We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness..."

The great men who wrote these words in the American Declaration of Independence from Great Britain and the Constitution that established the United States, knew that without this foundation, a democracy would not survive. By turning away from these basic principles of faith in absolute truth, we endanger the very freedoms once held dear.

Blessed Josemaría made it clear that freedom and faith are interrelated. In *Friends of God*, he said, "Throughout my years as a priest, whenever I have spoken, or rather shouted, about my love for personal freedom, I have noticed some people reacting with distrust, as if they suspected that my defense of freedom could endanger the faith. Such faint-hearted people can rest assured. The only freedom that can assail the faith is a misinterpreted freedom, an aimless freedom, one without objective principles, one that is lawless and irresponsible. In a word, licence. Unfortunately, this is what some people are advocating, and their claim does indeed constitute a threat to the faith"³.

My fear is that freedom in my country has been perverted by our culture into the lawless and irresponsible license to which Blessed Josemaría refers.

America's Founding Fathers believed that three interrelated principles were essential to the survival of our newly created Republic: faith, virtue, and freedom. Faith teaches us virtue. Virtue is a necessity for freedom. And freedom is necessary to the practice of faith.

A great American founder, Benjamin Franklin, once said, "Only a virtuous people are capable of freedom. As nations become more corrupt and vicious, they have more need of masters". He meant that in order for freedom to thrive, the people that make up a society must believe in right and wrong. They must act morally and treat each other with dignity and respect. They must seek to be good.

Benjamin Franklin would be quite disturbed by the decline in American society's virtue. In recent years, we have seen children gunning down children, children making and planting bombs to kill children, children who see no value

³ *Friends of God*, 32.

in the lives of others or their own. Life has become meaningless. Nihilism is a part of our youth culture.

As Franklin feared, our nation has begun to lose sight of virtue informed by faith, and our freedoms are threatened. How have we reached this point?

Disturbingly, the role of faith in our American history, and in our public and private virtue, is generally ignored in mainstream debate for fear of somehow violating our Constitution's First Amendment guarantee of freedom of religion. Yet faith is at the foundation of what America's founders believed would keep Americans virtuous, and therefore, free.

Patrick Henry, a great figure in the American Revolution, explained that, "It is when people forget God that tyrants forge their chains".

America's founders believed in the free exercise of faith — that there was a place in American society for people of all religions. And the founders wanted people of faith to be free from government intrusion in the practice of their faith.

But at the same time, they believed that faith keeps people virtuous. Again, it was America's founders who wrote:

"We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights..."

Without rights having the solid foundation the Declaration gives them, as gifts from our Creator, they may easily be set aside when it seems convenient to do so. If there is no higher authority from whom we derive the rights of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness", then we have no protection from those who lack respect for human dignity, for human life.

And finally, faith requires freedom. The First Amendment guarantees the rights of all Americans to freely practice their chosen religion. It also prevents the government from establishing a national religion.

In 1776, our nation was mostly Protestant, but today it is Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, and too many others to name. It is because of our constitutionally guaranteed freedom of religion that Americans are able to live together — side by side — with such diversity of faith. And it is because of these faiths that the American experiment has survived to this day.

But Americans now live in a pleasure driven culture. We are constantly told to do what feels right, to follow our hearts. The tenets of the popular culture are reinforced over and over again. We are given a pass on the painful, difficult decisions of discerning what is right, and then acting on what is right. The problem is that truth is relative — there is no absolute right and wrong. Without a shared belief system that is held and enforced, a culture disintegrates into moral chaos.

I believe that as a United States Senator, I have a moral responsibility to fight the descent of American culture into such relativism. I have a responsibility

to uphold the Constitution in the true sense of its creation, that it is only through faith in absolute truth that the American experiment in democracy will survive.

Yet, I am an elected representative in a very diverse society. My ideas do not always prevail. It is only by finding areas of common ground that I can effectively represent the best interests of my constituents. There have been many instances when I have worked with a congressional colleague, with whom I may rarely agree, on an issue that contributes to the common good of our society. It is very important to seek out these commonalities.

But faith and freedom are certainly not just American concerns. As public figures, we all understand that people will see our faith and devotion to God through our words, our deeds, and our manner. Faith must be woven into every moment of our daily lives. It is not a garment that we wear to Mass and then fold up neatly and put away until next week. I struggle, as we all do, to weave my faith into every moment and every action. It is here that I derive the most guidance from Blessed Josemaría.

He advised us in *Christ is Passing By* that “Through your work, through the whole network of human relations, you ought show the charity of Christ and its concrete expression in friendship, understanding, human affection, and peace. Just as Christ ‘went about doing good’ throughout Palestine, so must you also spread peace in your family circle, in civil society, on the job, and in your cultural and leisure activities. This will be the best proof that the kingdom of God has reached your heart”⁴.

Each day that I work with my colleagues in the U.S. Congress, with my constituents, and with others who have an interest in the functions and power of government, I am faced with conflict and disagreement. It is at these times that this passage comes to me. Even when it is most trying, I can disagree without being disagreeable. I strive to show the charity of Christ through civility and compassion for the issues and concerns that come before me as a public servant.

But I also seek utilize my position as a public servant to challenge young people in their faith, to challenge the notion that our society’s ills can be cured without faith, and to challenge those who diminish the value of human life in our society.

Why is it necessary for me, an elected official, to challenge young people — to ask them to look at their lives and their motivations? As I’ve mentioned, the sad answer is that too many American parents have allowed our culture to raise their children. But it is hard to condemn parents — they and their children are casualties of the cultural war in the United States. American society’s predomi-

⁴ *Christ is Passing By*, 166.

nant world view — “Who are we to judge this as wrong, who are we to tell you what’s right and wrong?” Remarkably, this world view extends to parents who have become non-judgmental to the point that they will not even fight for the souls of their own children.

When I was a kid, only a generation ago, parents who fought for the souls of their children were called strict parents, now they are called oppressive and authoritarian. Behavior that was once an affront to the basic moral code, a code grounded in truth, is now publicly accepted. Those who want to curb such behavior, or question such behavior, are dismissed as intolerant.

Let me elaborate on this reflection. In 1992, the United States Supreme Court authored a decision stating: “Our obligation is to define the liberty of all, not to mandate our own moral code.” They went on to define liberty: “At the heart of liberty is the right to define one’s own concept of existence, of meaning of the universe, of the mystery of life.” Our United States Supreme Court, not surprisingly, posited this in an abortion case ruling, *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, when the Court was reviewing the *Roe v. Wade* decision that has resulted in the killing of thirty million American children by abortion.

To paraphrase a quotation attributed to Joseph Stalin: one death is a tragedy, thirty million dead children is just a statistic. What are the other statistics that have resulted from our deconstructed moral code today? Half of all marriages in the United States end in divorce, a third of all American children are born out of wedlock. Drug abuse is at an all time high. Crime is rampant. And these statistics are for the general population. When we look at the statistics for the poor, it is devastating. More than half of marriages end in divorce, two-thirds of children are born out of wedlock ... they suffer from more crime, more drug abuse, more hopelessness, and more despair. The poor always pay the price. They pay the price for the elites’ desire to pursue happiness without consequence because they cannot afford to buy their way out of trouble. And so we mire the poor in hopelessness because of this desire to live “free” of moral restraints.

So what do I tell American children every chance I get? I tell them what my own mother told me: “All that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing.” I challenge them to be good, virtuous, faith-filled men and women, and to do something, each in each in their own lives, to live out absolute truth. I don’t ask them to scale the highest peaks, to overcome our cultural crises on their own, but to simply face the great challenge of being good. I ask them to seek truth — to seek the truthgiver — and to live their lives according to His code. To sanctify all that they do, regardless of its material or publicly recognized importance.

You can well imagine that when I offer such challenges to students in American colleges, I receive mixed reviews from the audience and from the fac-

ulty. A few years ago, I caused quite a stir at a college in my home state of Pennsylvania. Some in the audience were absolutely appalled that I had the gall to give such a ‘religious’ address at an academic institution where freedom of thought is tantamount. How dare I speak so freely?

Here, too, is where Blessed Josemaría guides my way:

“Once again they have spoken, they have written: in favour, against; with good and with not so good will; faint praise and slander; panegyrics and plaudits; hits and misses...

Don’t be a fool! As long as you are making straight for your goal, head and heart intoxicated with God, why worry about the voice of the wind, or the chirp of the cricket, or the mooing or the grunting or the braying?

Besides, it’s inevitable; don’t waste time answering back”⁵.

I love that. Some of my colleagues might say it is one that I have internalized too much. But it is so true. In our public lives, it would be easy to get whip-sawed by critics seeking to prevent us from living out our Catholic faith in all facets of our lives. It is this reminder that keeps me moving forward.

I would like to close with this passage from *Christ is Passing By*:

“Through our voluntary service of Jesus Christ, we should be witnesses to him in all our activities, for he is the Lord of our entire lives, the only and ultimate reason for our existence. Then, once we have given this witness of service, we will be able to give instruction by our word. That was how Christ acted. ‘He began to do and to teach’, he first taught by his action, and then by his divine preaching”⁶.

⁵ *The Way*, 688.

⁶ *Christ is Passing By*, 182.