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The American Way

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The First Amendment and primary guarantee of our Constitution is that every citizen has the right to free speech, public dissent and religious expression. I personally applaud our founding fathers for their insight into the necessity of such an amendment. And, it seems to have become the American way to publicly disagree with anything our government, or any authority says, does or decides. What is unfortunate, I believe, is that there is no specific requirement for "responsible" exercise of one's First Amendment rights. I was absolutely infuriated when the Supreme Court overturned the conviction of the young man who was ticketed and fined for his use of profanity in public while canoeing on the Rifle River, near Standish Michigan. Apparently we aren't to be protected from having to listen to offensive outbursts because there is no Constitutional protection from that. Still, to speak our minds freely is a sacred right that men and women have died to protect. I believe that we can best show our appreciation for such a personal sacrifice by speaking our mind, but guarded by wisdom and respectful of others.

Still over a year away, we are well into the political campaigning for the office of President of the U. S. However with this being a church publication, I am not trying to influence anybody toward or away from any candidate or party. (As a deacon, it would be grossly irresponsible for me to suggest that I might.) In the pursuit of winning the election, candidates can and often do, make conflicting and, at times outrageous, statements and proclamations. I believe that this is true of every candidate and just the nature of the political beast. The challenge of the responsible voter is to try and sift through the political rhetoric to reveal the unspoken agenda of the candidate and evaluate from a Christian perspective, the value of their agenda. This is not an easy task because we often are limited, by time and exposure, to biased critiques of the media. It takes a lot of time for a person to sit down and read thoroughly the *whole* speech or quietly listen to an opposing view. But for that person to really make informed decisions, it is what is required.

Just as above, in the political arena, a lot of what read or hear in the media about some church teaching or activity is filtered through the prejudices and biases of the reporter or their editors. I find it disturbing when I hear Catholics quote the Free Press or News about something the Pope said or did. If we were totally dependent on the media for information about the church one might think that every nun wants to be a priest, every priest or deacon is a pedophile and that the pope wants to lead the church back into the seventeenth century. Thus, being the *good American Catholic*, there is an obligation to continue, and maybe even expand, the misconceptions by adding our *free voice* to the "public outcry." As important as it is in the political arena, it is equally important in matters of our faith, to not let unchallenged emotion and misleading statements confuse our thinking and our faith. I sincerely doubt that the public media reporter or their editor has any real training in theology that would allow some credulity to their "insights". Further, I believe that there is a largely unchristian and definitely anti-catholic bias in the information and entertainment industry. This means that we, as good Catholic Americans are obligated to keep ourselves correctly informed as to what is truly happening in our church and our faith.

There are a wide variety of legitimate Catholic publications that we can choose from to expand our knowledge and understand the implications of what the Pope really said. There will likely be some disagreements by the various authors, but the ultimate goal is to inform, not entertain, and to build a unified Church. Armed with correct information and truer insight, we can and ought, join the public outcry, but with the truth and not the moronic rumblings of the secular press or entertainment industry. This also takes time and discipline. What we are challenged to be, is responsible citizens of *The City of God* and of America. The saints and our men and women have paid the price for such a great freedom, the greatest respect we can give that sacrifice is to take the time, make the effort to be correctly informed.