

A Letter from Bishop John Ricard to Senator Joseph Biden

Senator Joseph Biden  
United States Senate

4 November 2008

Dear Senator Biden,

I deeply appreciate the collaboration your office has extended to me and my brother bishops in advancing legislation which is beneficial to the poor and the destitute throughout the United States, and, indeed, the world. It is as a collaborator for the common good, and as pastor of the Church in Pensacola-Tallahassee that I write to you with similar urgency.

I learned recently of your visit to the diocese during the political campaign and that you attended the celebration of Sunday Mass in a local parish. The Church of Pensacola-Tallahassee welcomes all people of good will, all the baptized to pray with us. In particular, we welcome our fellow Catholics who seek to fulfill their Sunday obligation in a spirit of communion by participating in Sunday Mass.

Sunday Mass provides Catholics with the nourishment to live in the image of Jesus Christ whose mission is directed to the orphan and the widow, to the poor and the vulnerable. The principles of right reason, knowable to all even beyond the categories of faith, attest the common good is served only when the least of our brethren are accorded full rights correspondent to their inviolable dignity. Thus, human life is to be respected from the moment of conception until natural death. The Church has taught this from the beginning, and civilized societies live by this principle.

Our worship of God during Sunday Mass, which culminates in the reception of Holy Communion, is precisely the moment when we are nourished and strengthened by the Holy Spirit's gift of courage to stand up in fortitude to protect the weakest among us. The Eucharist, as the real presence of Christ, is also the sign of our unity as a Church, which is built on sharing in the mission of Christ to protect the defenseless. While grateful for the effective collaboration you and your office have offered on so many worthy projects and concerns, I also observe, by your support for laws that fail to protect the unborn, a profound disconnection from your human and personal obligation to protect the weakest and most innocent among us: the child in the womb.

As the bishops said in their 2004 reflection on *Catholics in Public Life*, "The Eucharist is the source and summit of Catholic life. Therefore, like every Catholic generation before us, we must be guided by the words of St. Paul, 'Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the Body and Blood of the Lord' (1 Cor 11:27). This means that all must examine their consciences as to their worthiness to receive the Body and Blood of our Lord. This examination includes fidelity to the moral teaching of the Church in personal and public life. . . . Respect for the Holy Eucharist, in particular, demands that it be received worthily and that it be seen as the source for our common mission in the world."

I pray that the Catholic faith you have been raised in, the faith by which you pray, and the life of virtue which flows from both may strengthen you so that you may have the strength needed to witness Jesus, even as the martyrs did, and live by the virtue of fortitude as you proclaim your support to the Person of Christ in the most vulnerable of his members: the pre-born child. You are, Senator, always welcome to nourish such a faith within the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee.

John Ricard SSJ  
Bishop of Pensacola Tallahassee