



During election seasons, many Catholics face a dilemma that seems impossible to resolve: how can one vote in a way that is faithful to the Gospel when no candidate fully embodies Catholic values? The most common response—even from some within the Church—is to vote for the “lesser evil.” But is this really a Catholic approach? What does the Church actually teach about this line of thinking? Can voting for the “lesser evil” be sinful?

This article aims to offer a profound, accessible, and spiritually grounded reflection on this pressing and current issue, rooted in the **Catechism of the Catholic Church** (especially §2240), Sacred Scripture, and the living Tradition of the Church. Because voting is not merely a civic act—it is, above all, a moral act.

1. The Political Responsibility of Catholics According to the Catechism

The **Catechism of the Catholic Church**, in **paragraph 2240**, teaches:

“Submission to legitimate authorities and service of the common good require citizens to fulfill their roles in the life of the political community. Submission to authority and co-responsibility for the common good make it morally obligatory to pay taxes, to exercise the right to vote, and to defend one’s country.”

Here, the Church not only acknowledges the duty to participate in public life, but also emphasizes the **moral dimension** of doing so. Voting is not a neutral option—it is part of our **responsibility as citizens of Heaven living on Earth** (cf. Philippians 3:20).

2. Discerning the Vote: Is Choosing the Lesser Evil Morally Acceptable?

In Catholic moral theology, there exists a principle known as the **principle of the lesser evil**, but its application is far more nuanced than many believe.



What the Church does teach:

When two **unavoidable evils** are present, one may **tolerate** the lesser if neither can be prevented. But this applies to **passive tolerance, not to active cooperation** with evil.

What the Church does not teach:

The Church does **not teach that one may actively choose a moral evil just to avoid a greater one**. One must never **will evil directly**, even if it's "lesser." The Catechism, in paragraph 1756, is crystal clear:

"It is therefore an error to judge the morality of human acts by considering only the intention that inspires them or the circumstances [...] One may not do evil so that good may result from it."

And the Apostle Paul affirms:

"And why not say, as we are slanderously reported as saying, and as some claim we say, 'Let us do evil that good may come'? Their condemnation is just." (Romans 3:8)

So, if a candidate promotes **intrinsically evil laws or actions** (such as abortion, euthanasia, gender ideology, religious persecution, or structural injustice), a Catholic **cannot knowingly support** them—even in the name of the lesser evil—**without risking grave sin** if a morally acceptable alternative exists.

3. A Historical Look at Political Discernment in the Church

Throughout history, the Church has taught the faithful to practice political discernment with one guiding principle: **the primacy of the moral law over any structure of power**. In the



early centuries, Christians suffered martyrdom for refusing to worship the emperor. They did not vote for the “less pagan” ruler—they **preferred to die rather than cooperate with evil**.

In modern times, Church documents such as the “**Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church**” and encyclicals like *Evangelium Vitae* by Saint John Paul II reaffirm that political involvement must not be divorced from a well-formed conscience. Saint John Paul II wrote:

“A law which legitimizes the direct and voluntary killing of an innocent human being is in complete opposition to the inviolable right to life proper to every individual.” (*Evangelium Vitae*, 72)

4. Practical Guide: How to Vote as a Faithful Catholic

Here is a concrete pastoral guide to help discern your vote with moral integrity:

□ Step 1: **Form your conscience well**

- Read the Catechism (especially §§2240, 1735–1756).
- Consult Church documents like *Evangelium Vitae*, *Caritas in Veritate*, and the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*.
- Do not let emotions, popularity, or partisan strategies guide your decision.

□ Step 2: **Identify the non-negotiable principles**

According to Benedict XVI and the constant teaching of the Church, there are principles that **cannot be compromised**, even for political convenience:

- Defense of life (from conception to natural death).
- Protection of marriage and the natural family.
- Religious freedom.
- Parents’ right to educate their children according to their faith.



□ Step 3: **Evaluate the candidates**

- Do they promote the integral common good or merely ideological interests?
- Have they supported or voted for immoral laws?
- Does their platform directly attack non-negotiable principles?

□ Step 4: **Seek the possible good, not the tolerable evil**

- If no candidate is perfect, choose one who **does not endorse intrinsic evils**, even if they are weak in other, less fundamental areas.
- With a well-formed conscience, if all candidates are morally unacceptable, it is **permissible to abstain or cast a blank vote**—as a witness, not as indifference.

□ Step 5: **Act in prayer**

- Before voting, pray to the Holy Spirit. Ask for light to make a sound moral choice.
- Pray for political leaders, even those you disagree with (cf. 1 Timothy 2:1-2).

5. What if I've Already Voted for the Lesser Evil Unknowingly?

The Church always offers **light, not condemnation**. If someone has voted wrongly out of non-culpable ignorance, they have not sinned. But if one knowingly votes to support a grave moral evil, **confession is necessary**, and one should commit to voting rightly in the future.

6. Politics as an Act of Charity

Saint John XXIII put it clearly:

“*Politics is a most noble form of charity.*”

Thus, it is not just about voting well—it is about **actively contributing to the construction of the common good**, beginning with the family, the parish, the local community, education, and service to the poor.



7. Conclusion: The Conscience Does Not Negotiate with Evil

Faithfulness to Christ requires courage. In a world that pushes relativism, Christians must be the **salt of the earth and light of the world** (Matthew 5:13-14), even in the voting booth.

Voting is not about choosing between two evils, but about **seeking and supporting the good that can be accomplished without betraying the truth of the Gospel**. When this is not possible, it is better to abstain than to become complicit in injustice.

As Saint Thomas More, martyr of conscience, once said:

“I die the King’s good servant—but God’s first.”

□ Spiritual Guide for Political Discernment

- **Examination of conscience before voting:** Am I guided by faith or by personal interest?
- **Frequent confession:** Especially in times of significant decisions.
- **Eucharistic adoration:** Ask for clarity before the Blessed Sacrament.
- **Prayer for the conversion of political leaders:** Even those who oppose the faith.
- **Ongoing study of Catholic doctrine:** So as not to be “tossed about by every wind of doctrine” (Ephesians 4:14).