

‘Worthy to Receive the Lamb: Catholics in Political Life and the Reception of Holy Communion’

As bishops, we have the obligation to teach and guide the Catholic Faithful whom we shepherd in the Body of Christ. A fundamental teaching of our Church is respect for the sacred gift of life. This teaching flows from the Natural Law and from Divine Revelation.

Life is a gift bestowed upon us by God, a truth underscored by the commandment: “You shall not kill” (Deut 5: 17). The Old Testament also teaches us that human life in the womb is precious to God: “...I formed you in the womb...” (Jer 1: 5). The right to life is a value “which no individual, no majority and no State can ever create, modify or destroy, but must only acknowledge, respect and promote” (Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, 71a).

A law, therefore, which legitimizes the direct killing of innocent human beings through abortion is intrinsically unjust, since it is directly opposed to the natural law, to God’s revealed commandments, and to the consequent right of every individual to possess life, from the moment of conception to the moment of natural death.

Catholics in political life have the responsibility to exemplify in their public service this teaching of the Church, and to work for the protection of all innocent life. There can be no contradiction between the values bestowed by Baptism and the Catholic Faith, and the public expression of those values. Catholic public officials who consistently support abortion on demand are cooperating with evil in a public manner. By supporting pro-abortion legislation they participate in manifest grave sin, a condition which excludes them from admission to Holy Communion as long as they persist in the pro-abortion stance (cf. Canon 915).

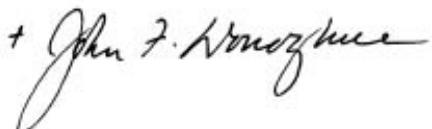
Holy Communion is where Catholics meet as a family in Christ, united by a common faith. Every Catholic is responsible for being properly prepared for this profound union with Christ. Participation in Holy Communion requires certain dispositions on the part of the communicant, namely, perseverance in the life of grace, and communion in the faith of the Church, in the sacraments, and in the hierarchical order of the Church (Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 35-38).

The Church also recognizes that there is a manifest lack of a proper disposition for Holy Communion in those whose outward conduct is “seriously, clearly, and steadfastly contrary” to the Church’s moral teaching (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 37b). A manifest lack of proper disposition for Holy Communion is found to be present in those who consistently support pro-abortion legislation. Because support for pro-abortion legislation is gravely sinful, such persons should not be admitted to Holy Communion.

We also take this opportunity to address all Catholics whose beliefs and conduct do not correspond to the Gospel and to Church teaching. To receive the great gift of God — the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ — we must approach Holy Communion free from mortal sin. Those who are conscious of being in a state of grave sin should avail themselves of the Sacrament of Reconciliation before coming to Holy Communion. To partake of the Eucharist is to partake of Christ Himself, and to enter into sacramental communion with our Lord we must all be properly disposed.

Because of the influence that Catholics in public life have on the conduct of our daily lives and on the formation of our nation’s future, we declare that Catholics serving in public life espousing positions contrary to the teaching of the Church on the sanctity and inviolability of human life, especially those running for or elected to public office, are not to be admitted to Holy Communion in any Catholic church within our jurisdictions: the Archdiocese of Atlanta, the Dioceses of Charleston and Charlotte. Only after reconciliation with the Church has occurred, with the knowledge and consent of the local bishop, and public disavowal of former support for procured abortion, will the individual be permitted to approach the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist.

We undertake this action to safeguard the sacred dignity of the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar, to reassure the faithful, and to save sinners.



Most Reverend John F. Donoghue
Archbishop of Atlanta



Most Reverend Peter J. Jugis
Bishop of Charlotte



Most Reverend Robert J. Baker
Bishop of Charleston