Elections provide an opportunity for civic renewal

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Election Day reveals the rule of law. Without violence, our electoral system ensures the orderly transfer of power. And we willingly acquiesce to this peaceful process.

Election Day displays the power of communications. With well-spun images, the media creates political personalities and pumps up the popularity of citizens turned candidates. And we are better informed to make our political choices.

Election Day discloses a marketplace, not merely of dollars and cents, but of people and ideas. Candidates debate and disagree, hopefully in civil discourse. They may be Republican or Democrats, but these are identifying labels that distinguish rather than divide. Voters assume direct responsibility for their own futures in the act of casting a ballot. And by this act, we are rendered equal in the exercise of political power.

Election Day demonstrates the essence of our freedom. As citizens we are free to choose our political representatives. This is our right. And using our freedom we engender a social contract to abide by the legitimate outcomes of the election process, no matter which candidate is victorious. This is our responsibility.

Ultimately, Election Day also reflects our religious character. In voting, we do not merely seek the advancement of special interests or the assertion of special privileges. Rather, we aspire to elect representatives who, individually and collective, will form a social conscience that concerns itself with the true development of our people and our land. In doing so, no matter how “local” are the questions and problems to be addressed, we transcend our individuality and participate in a process benefiting the common good of all.

When we consider Election Day to be “religious” in this sense, rather than instigating divisive partisanship concerning particular issues, we are keeping in mind the fundamental vision that sustains our country’s history. As Pope John Paul II remarked in his 1998 address to the U.S. ambassador to the Holy See, Americans assert a “claim to freedom and independence on the basis of certain ‘self-evident’ truths about the human persons, truths which could be discerned in human nature, built into it by ‘nature’s God’.”

Our independence discloses to all the world an undying resolve amidst the perplexities that now surround us. Yet the current climate of fear need not engulf us. Rather, we have the means for giving a civic response to the deeply human, and ultimately religious, questions of our lives. As the pope concluded in his 1995 address to the United Nations: “The answer to the fear which darkens human existence ... is the common effort to build the civilization of love, founded on the universal values of peace, solidarity, justice, and liberty. And the ‘soul’ of the civilization of love is the culture of freedom: the freedom of individuals and the freedom of nations, lived in self-giving solidarity and responsibility.”

Since freedom is the cornerstone of our American way of life, elections are the brick and mortar with which we rebuild. We make our contribution to this civic construction with our vote. By fulfilling our duty as citizens, we can restore a proper religious character to our contemporary
culture. For true religion is not an inspiration for terror but the underlying support for any civilization and for every human community.

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