ELECTION 2008: VOTERS SHOULD CONSIDER PRUDENCE AND PRIORITIZATION, URGES BC THEOLOGIAN KENNETH HIMES

By Clarissa Aljentera, Boston College Chronicle Correspondent

When it comes time to cast ballots in the 2008 presidential election, according to BC Theology Department chairman Prof. Kenneth Himes, OFM, voters should consider the two "P"s: prudence and prioritization.

Fr. Himes offered this advice to an audience of approximately 100 during a talk, "Meeting Jesus in the Voting Booth: Faith and the 2008 Election," in Hillside Café.

Referencing the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops document "Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship," Fr. Himes urged the audience to become informed voters and to engage each other in open and honest conversations.

“This is not just for the election, but for any year in a society,” he said.

Being an informed voter, he said, involves taking a wider, and longer, view in assessing a candidate: Prioritize the issues that are most important to you, assess how the candidate's views compare with yours — and decide whether the areas where you disagree are significant enough to deter you from voting for him or her.

“Support for a candidate is not the same as supporting everything that candidate believes,” he said. “Some issues have greater weight.”

Fr. Himes also told the audience they should consider an ethical framework in deciding for whom to cast their vote. “See how the candidates stand on human life and human dignity. In the United States it is difficult to find any candidate who embraces a conscious ethic of life across the board.”

During the evening, Fr. Himes posed several hypothetical situations to give audience members an opportunity to explore what would be considered acts of conscience and eventual good will, and how these might relate to the political realm. One example was a surgeon who has to amputate a limb of a seriously ill patient, an action which saves the patient's life yet also mutilates him or her physically and causes psychological damage.

“[The] surgeon was consciously saving a life,” he said. “In pursuing good we bring about a certain harm.”

In another example, Fr. Himes cited a woman with various roles, including doctor, mother, sibling, amateur gardener and avid traveler — all important and useful roles, but requiring her to use prudence in deciding on which to focus her time and energy as circumstances dictate.
Fr. Himes complimented the large audience of undergraduates and graduate students for paying attention to this year’s election.

“One of my greatest pleasures in this campaign is the energy around it exhibited by young people,” said Fr. Himes, noting that the college-age turnout has not been particularly impressive in previous presidential elections. When one student asked Fr. Himes who would be earning his vote this November, the Theology chairman lightly demurred.

“It is a secret ballot in America,” joked Fr. Himes, who immediately began sipping his water. “My role as an educator is not to tell you what I think.”

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