

## A PRAYER BEFORE VOTING

By

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Not since the Viet Nam War have I witnessed an election so tainted with anger, so gripped with indignation, so driven by rage as the one in which we will participate on Tuesday.

Insults and accusations fly back and forth; supporters get into shoving matches and fist fights. Complex and difficult subjects are reduced to two word sound bites, photographic caricatures, half-truths, and simplistic pabulum that treats voters like children or fools.

Commercials unashamedly appeal to our basest, vilest, meanest instincts.

Where is all this religion and family values that was so important a couple of elections ago? Where is this return to God that we were promised? I see little of it evidenced by those who seek our votes.

So I guess it's up to us, the voters.

See, you might be able to separate church and state but you can't separate faith and politics.

Church and state are institutions. They are concrete and have distinct boundaries. They can be differentiated.

Faith and politics, on the other hand, are ideas. They live not in the world but in our hearts and minds. They are abstract. Their boundaries overlap.

We do not leave our religious faith at the door of the polling place. We take it with us right into the voting booth. If we are Christians, the values that Jesus teaches us guide us as we make our political decisions. The red letters in our Bibles imprint themselves upon our hearts and minds as we pull the levers of democracy.

So it is altogether appropriate that people of faith should pause for a moment and pray before we enter that booth.

Not long ago I stumbled upon this prayer, based upon a Franciscan benediction that speaks to the complexities and responsibilities that democracy places upon us. I commend it to you this Tuesday. Put your anger and your indignation aside. Take a deep breath. Cool down. Say a prayer – maybe this one – and then vote your conscience and your faith.

*“God, bless me with discomfort at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships, so that you may live deep within my heart.*

*“Bless me with anger at injustice, oppression and exploitation so that you may work through me for justice, freedom and peace.*

*“Bless me with tears for those who suffer in pain, rejection, starvation and war. Strengthen me to reach out to them so that you might comfort them through me and turn their pain to joy.*

*“And bless me with enough foolishness to believe that you can use me to make a difference in this world and that, together, we can do what others claim cannot be done. Amen.”*