

Florida bishop urges Biden to examine conscience before Communion

PENSACOLA, Fla. - A Florida bishop is urging Vice President-elect Joseph Biden to examine his conscience before receiving Holy Communion in light of his public support of keeping abortion legal.

Saying he was writing with a sense of "urgency," Bishop John H. Ricard of Pensacola-Tallahassee, Fla., sent a letter Nov. 4 to Biden stating his views on worshipping at Mass and the reception of Communion. The letter was posted on the diocesan Web site two days after Biden attended Mass Nov. 2 at the Co-Cathedral of St. Thomas More in Tallahassee. The vice president-elect was in Florida on a final campaign swing through the state.

At no point in the letter did the bishop bar the vice president-elect from receiving Communion in the diocese, instead seeming to leave the decision to Sen. Biden.

A spokesman for Sen. Biden said in an e-mail message to Catholic News Service that the vice president-elect would have no comment.

Citing the U.S. bishops' 2004 reflection on "Catholics in Public Life," Bishop Ricard, an auxiliary in the Archdiocese of Baltimore from 1984-97, wrote that Catholics must be guided by the words of St. Paul as they prepare to receive the sacrament: "Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord."

"Respect for the Holy Eucharist, in particular, demands that it be received worthily and that it be seen as the source for our common mission in the world," he said.

The bishop reminded Sen. Biden that the church teaches that human life must be respected from conception through natural death. He also thanked the outgoing senator from Delaware for his support of legislation and programs that benefit the poor and destitute.

“While grateful for the effective collaboration you and your office have offered on so many worthy projects and concerns, I also observe, by your support for laws that fail to protect the unborn, a profound disconnection from your human and personal obligation to protect the weakest and most innocent among us: the child in the womb,” Bishop Ricard wrote.

Bishop Ricard concluded his letter by saying the vice president-elect was welcome to “nourish” his faith at any time within the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee.

He also said he was praying for Sen. Biden so that “the Catholic faith you have been raised in, the faith by which you pray, and the life of virtue which flows from both may strengthen you so that you may have the strength needed to witness Jesus ... as you proclaim your support to the person of Christ in the most vulnerable of his members: the pre-born child.”

Editor’s Note: The full text of Bishop Ricard’s letter is posted online at www.ptdiocese.org/documents/Ricard%20to%20Biden%2011_04_08.pdf.