

Pope Francis speaks about voting.

Pope Francis said that American voters face the choice between “the lesser evil” in the U.S. presidential election during an in-flight press conference Friday on his return from his nearly two-week tour of Southeast Asia.

Speaking aboard the papal plane, a chartered Singapore Airlines flight, on Sept. 13, the pope encouraged Catholics to vote with their conscience.

In political morality, in general they say that if you don’t vote, it’s not good, it’s bad. You have to vote, and you have to choose the lesser evil,” he said. What is the lesser evil? That woman, or that man?” he continued, referring to Vice President Kamala Harris and her Republican opponent, former president Donald Trump. “I don’t know. Each one, in his or her conscience, must think and do this.”

Pope Francis replied: “Both are anti-life — both the one who throws out migrants and the one who kills babies — both of them are against life.”

Harris, a Democrat who has made abortion without legal restrictions the centerpiece of her presidential campaign, and Trump, who has called for the deportations of perhaps millions of immigrants who have entered the U.S. illegally in recent years, are locked in a tight contest with just 52 days to go before the Nov. 5 election.

The Holy Father’s remarks about “the lesser evil” refers to the Church’s **long-standing teaching** that when faced with a choice between candidates who aren’t wholly aligned with the Church’s position on fundamental “nonnegotiable” issues — such as the sanctity of life, marriage, and religious freedom — it is permissible to cast a vote against the candidate who would do the most harm.

The pope went on to say that the science supports that life begins at conception, adding that although people may not like to use the word “kill” when discussing the topic, abortion is “murder.”

“To have an abortion is to kill a human being,” Francis said.

“The Church does not allow abortion because it is to kill, it is murder,” he added. “It is murder. And this we have to be clear about.”

In their **updated voters guide**, the U.S. bishops state: “The threat of abortion remains our preeminent priority because it directly attacks our most vulnerable and voiceless brothers and sisters and destroys more than a million lives per year in our country alone.”

Pope Francis also spoke strongly about the topic of immigration, recalling his visit to Mexico’s border with the United States where he offered Mass near the Diocese of El Paso, saying that “to send migrants away” or to not give them welcome is “sinful.”

“Sending migrants away, not letting them develop, not letting them have life, is a bad and nasty thing. Sending a baby away from its mother’s breast is murder because there is life. On these things, we must speak plainly,” he said.