

THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE SECOND ROUND OF THE 2022 ELECTIONS

Brothers and Sisters,

We are bishops of the Catholic Church from various regions of Brazil, in deep communion with Pope Francisco and his magisterium and in full communion with the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil, the CNBB, which, in the exercise of its evangelizing mission, always stands in defense of the little ones, of justice and peace. We lead the writing of a first Letter to the People of God, in July 2020. Faced with the seriousness of the current moment, we turn to you once again.

The second round of the 2022 presidential elections presents us with a dramatic challenge. We must choose, consciously and calmly, because there is no room for neutrality when it comes to deciding about two projects for Brazil, one democratic and the other authoritarian; one committed to the defense of life, starting with the impoverished, the other committed to the "economy that kills" (Pope Francisco, *Evangelii Gaudium* - *The Joy of the Gospel*, 53); one that takes care of education, health, work, food, culture, the other that despises public policies because it despises the poor. The two candidates have already governed Brazil and have given different results for the people and for environment, which we can analyze.

Enlightened by the social and political demands of our Christian faith and the Social Teaching of the Catholic Church, we need to speak clearly and directly about what is really at stake right now. Jesus commanded us to be "light of the world" and the light must not remain hidden (Mt 5:15).

We are witnesses that the current government, which is seeking reelection, has turned its back on the poorest people, especially at the time of the pandemic. Only on the eve of the election, it launched a temporary aid program for the needy. The 59th General Assembly of the CNBB noted "*the alarming carelessness with the Environment, the latent, explicit and growing violence, potentiated by the flexibilization of the possession and carrying of weapons* [...]. Among other aspects of these times are unemployment and lack of access to quality education for all. Hunger is certainly the most cruel and criminal of them, since food is an inalienable right" (*Message of the CNBB to the Brazilian People about the Current Moment*). Life is not a priority for this government.

The head of government and his supporters, mainly politicians and religious, have abused the name of God to legitimize their actions and are still using it for electoral purposes. The use of God's name in vain is a disrespect to the 2nd commandment. The abuse of religion for electoral purposes was condemned in an official note from the presidency of the CNBB (10/11/2022), for which "religious manipulation always distorts the values of the Gospel and takes the focus off the real problems that need to be debated and faced in our Brazil".

While saying "God above all," the President offended women, debauched people who died of asphyxiation, and showed no compassion for the nearly 700,000 lives lost to covid-19 and the 33 million starving people in his country. Let us remember that Brazil had left the hunger map in 2014, due to the social programs of previous governments. In practice, this appeal to God is a lie, because it does not fulfill what Jesus presented as the greatest of the commandments: love God above all things and your neighbor as yourself (Mt 22:37). Anyone who says he loves God but hates his brother is a "liar" (1 John 4:20).

The speeches and measures that aim to arm all people and eliminate opponents are in contradiction with both the 5th commandment, which says "Thou shall not kill," and the Social Doctrine of the Church, which proposes *disarmament* and says that "the enormous increase in arms represents a grave threat to stability and peace" (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 508).

We have lived four years under the reign of lies, secrecy, and false information. *Fake news* (fake news spread as if it were truth) has become the "official" way for the government to communicate with the people.

This hurts the 8th commandment, not to bear false witness, but it also shows who is the true "master" of those who perversely engage in spreading falsehoods and concealing information of public interest. Jesus says that the Devil is the father of lies (Jn 8:44), while He is the "way, the truth and the life" (Jn 14:6).

The *Message to the Brazilian People*, from the 59th General Assembly of the CNBB, also warned us that "our young democracy needs to be protected, by means of a broad national pact". However, the current government and the Congressmen who support it are threatening to change the composition of the Supreme Court in order to create a majority that will support their actions. The control of the legislative and judiciary powers has always been the determining step for the establishment of dictatorships in the world.

Christians are capable of analyzing which of the two projects in dispute is closer to humanist principles and integral ecology. It is enough to analyze with data and numbers and ask: which of the competing candidates valued health, education and the overcoming of poverty and misery more, and which one withdrew funds from the SUS, from education and ended social programs? Who took care of environment, especially the Amazon, and who encouraged the burning of the forests, the illegal trafficking of wood, and mining on indigenous lands?

This is not a religious dispute, nor a mere party-political choice, nor is it about choosing the perfect candidate, but a decision about the future of our country, of democracy, and of the people. The Church does not have a party, and never will, but she has a side, and always will: the side of justice and peace, of truth and solidarity, of love and equality, of religious freedom and the secular state, of social inclusion and the good life for all. That is why its ministers cannot fail to take a stand when it comes to defending the life of human beings and of nature. Our motivation is ethical and does not derive from following a political leader, nor from personal preferences, but comes from fidelity to the Gospel of Jesus, the Social Doctrine of the Church, and the prophetic magisterium of Pope Francis.

God bless the Brazilian people and may the Holy Spirit of wisdom and truth enlighten our minds and hearts as we vote in this second round of the 2022 elections. Let us see Jesus in the face of each person, especially the poor who suffer, and not in human authorities who manipulate them in the name of an ideological project of political and economic power.

On October 24, 2022, the Memorial of St. Anthony Mary Claret, bishop.

Bishops of Dialog for the Kingdom