

Philippine politicians sign honest poll covenant



Candidates in this month's elections signed a covenant for "truthful, responsible, upright, transparent, and honest" polls during a Mass led by Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle at the Manila Cathedral on May 2.

Of the five presidential candidates, only administration candidate Manuel Roxas and opposition standard bearer Jejomar Binay attended the event.

"In being candidates, you need to know that it is a blessing that comes with a responsibility," said Cardinal Tagle. "If you win, it means you must represent the people's dreams and common good," he added.

In signing the covenant, which was drafted by Catholic Church leaders, the candidates vowed to support people's right to vote, avoid resorting to the "politics of personalities and patronage," and "refrain from using guns, goons and gold."

The candidates were obliged to "strongly admonish relatives, friends, followers, and supporters to desist from using violence, deceit, fraud and other unfair and dishonest practices."

Cardinal Tagle told candidates that they are "blessed" but also have a "great responsibility."

"Blessings cannot come without responsibilities. They go hand in hand," the prelate said. He urged candidates "to study the real needs of the people" and go beyond party politics "because we are already talking about common good."

The cardinal referred to the May 9 elections as a "blessing," saying that in some countries people still do not have the opportunity to elect their leaders.

"We participate through our vote in forging the destiny of our country," said Cardinal Tagle. "We participate by choosing people who will represent our dreams, our desires, our destiny," he added.

Catholics urged not to back 'morally reprehensible' candidate

Meanwhile, the country's Catholic bishops issued a pastoral letter on May 1 urging Filipino Catholics not to vote for a president who "takes positions that are not only politically precarious but worse, morally reprehensible."

The bishops cautioned the faithful against voting out of frustration after suffering from the incompetence and indifference of previous government leaders.

"Not everything is fair game in politics," read the pastoral statement signed by Archbishop Socrates Villegas of Lingayen-Dagupan, president of the Philippine bishops' conference.

"The desire for change is understandable. Our people have suffered from incompetence and indifference," said Archbishop Villegas.

"But this cannot take the form of supporting a candidate whose speech and actions, whose plans and projects show scant regard for the rights of all," he added.

Titled "Prophets of Truth, Servants of Unity, Pastoral Appeal in the Spirit of Our Love of God and Country," the bishops' statement enjoined the faithful to continue to pray the Rosary for peaceful elections.

The bishops said the church has always demanded of Catholic voters that they cast their votes as an "act not only of citizenship but also as a public declaration of faith."

The bishops told candidates not to "deceive or mislead the people by proffering them falsehoods, much less defraud the nation."

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