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Voting: Don't Take It For Granted

Michael Sean Winters | Nov. 2, 2010 Distinctly Catholic

I have dim memories of the 1968 and 1972 elections.

But, my first vivid memory of an election happened in the summer of 1973 when I lived in Athens with friends. Greece was still governed by a junta of military leaders. They were trying to create an air of legitimacy for their regime, and so they decided to hold a referendum on a new constitution.

The day before the voting, three truck loads of armed guards, complete with machine guns, arrived at the polling place in the school across the street from our apartment. The ballots to vote in favor of the referendum were marked "Nai" or "Yes" in bright blue, the national color of Greece. The "Oxi" or "No" ballots were in a dingy grey. The voters selected a ballot and put it into a translucent envelope and if you selected the grey "Oxi" ballot, your name was taken down.

This was not how we had voted in my hometown in Connecticut which was, and is still, governed by an annual town meeting.

Ever since that summer in Athens, I have relished the right we Americans enjoy of voting freely. Today, at the school where I voted, there were no armed guards, just shivering campaign workers passing out flyers. I ran into our state assembly representative, Anne Healy, a woman whose sister-in-law I met more than ten years ago when she was the editor of the diocesan Catholic newspaper in the Virgin Islands. There are only a thousand people in the world! Healy is also that rare breed, a pro-life Democrat. I like voting for her a lot. I also got to vote for my fellow Catholic University alum Martin O'Malley who has done a splendid job as governor and is headed to an easy re-election. Most of all, I was grateful again for the chance to exercise my franchise free from intimidation and fear. It is a great blessing.

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