

Sermon at Brecon Cathedral

Sunday 05 May 2015 at 11.00am

The 5th Sunday of Easter (John 15. 1-8)

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Dean of Brecon

Goodness always tends to spread. Every authentic experience of truth and goodness seeks by its very nature to grow within us... As it expands, goodness takes root and develops. If we wish to lead a dignified and fulfilling life, we have to reach out to others and seek their good.¹

Today's Gospel reading is part of what is known as Christ's 'Farewell Discourses'. John presents Jesus' final mandate for the Disciples before His death. There were two pertinent questions looming for them. The question about what was about to break up; and the second about what is coming into being? This time next week, Britain may have embarked on a different political trajectory to the last five years. Some say this is one of the most significant elections in recent history. What might seem like decay and crisis for one person, is a departure for new shores and aspirations for others.

At the heart of the good news is a clear social mandate to offer charity, because all human life has dignity and value. **If we wish to lead a dignified and fulfilling life, we have to reach out to others and seek their good.** We are all intimately connected to each other. Today's gospel about Jesus as the vine and we are the branches, is a metaphor for being connected with God and each other. This, alongside the Gospel mandate to offer charity, must embrace all dimensions of our lives. Nothing and nobody must be excluded from charity, which is why we must not restrict offering it to personal and family members only, but extend and influence societal and national life, so the vulnerable and poor will benefit also.

This week's election gives us all the opportunity to show charity, to exercise our faith because we also want to make a difference to those less fortunate. So, **'if we wish to lead a dignified and fulfilling life, we have to reach out to others and seek their good.'** For some people, voting in this election is not a comfortable or easy one, as we weigh up the pros and cons. Yet, hopefully our decision will flow from our deep desire to change the world, to transmit how important connectivity with others is, and make our society and world a better place, so that as Pope Francis wrote, 'goodness will spread'.

And so, as Christians we pray today, not only that we gain wisdom in our voting considerations but that our vote will also benefit the excluded and poorest. Alongside this, as hard as this may be for some of us, we are called to pray also for our politicians,

¹ *Apostolic Exhortation: Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis, on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World, Section 2.9, page 9. Written on the Feast of Christ the King, 2013.

so that after 07 May, goodness will take root and expand in our nation. We pray for them and the new government when it is formed, because like the vine and branches in the gospel story, they become more connected to the complex social and global relationships with other nations. Pray they will become more capable, courteous, and work hard to heal the deepest roots and evils in our society, and indeed in Europe and beyond.²

So we are to pray also that politicians and the government will resolve the structural causes of poverty with urgency for the good of our communities because **if [they] wish to lead a dignified and fulfilling life, [they will also] have to reach out to others and seek their good.** Welfare projects and provisions like food banks and cooperatives can only be temporary responses to the problems facing the poorest, and these need to be radically resolved by rejecting the absolute ideologies of the markets and financial speculations.

Thomas Aquinas was right when he wrote that government exists for the good of all people and not for the good of the rulers'. Indeed, this idea coined the 15th Century word 'Commonwealth'. It is written into the heart of our language of 'public services', and the description of our administration as 'civil service'. Remember the downfall of Charles 1st for rejecting the idea of common good.

It is my hope, in the days leading to the election, that politicians will not exploit the complex issues of the poor with cheap rhetoric or casual indifference that empties the poor of meaning and purpose even further. Reaching the dignity of the poor requires more than economic growth from our political leaders. It requires decisions and mechanisms that bring about a fair distribution of income and resources for every citizen.

So today, this last Sunday and days leading to this significant election, we pray that our politicians will be disturbed by the state of British society and the plight of victims across the world. We pray they will aspire to broaden horizons from economic growth and ensure bills and laws are passed to ensure the most vulnerable have the resources to live well. Perhaps politicians could turn to God, and pray for him to inspire and motivate them in new directions.

The fruit in the story of the vine and branches seems to want productivity, but productivity does not usually create deep, abiding, and intimate relationships. Productivity of itself only creates transactions. Jesus is not talking about or demanding productivity. The fruit is not an economic output. He wants, and offers, connectivity, relationship, and intimacy. This is what he means when he calls us to abide in him, who is the vine. We are connected to Him, as well as connected with each other, not because

² *Apostolic Exhortation: Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis, on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World.

we produce anything, but we because we are made in God's image, with dignity and value, even if we do not produce anything of societal or monetary value.

We are called to make connections that are life-giving, not only to family and friends, but to strangers who are disconnected from society through suffering and poverty. Our vote will make a difference. Our relationship with Jesus Christ, is a relationship of union even as a branch is united to the vine. We live our lives as one. Our faith as Christians affects others too. It is the basis for our relationships with one another. We continually consider how we can live one life together because:

Goodness always tends to spread. Every authentic experience of truth and goodness seeks by its very nature to grow within us... As it expands, goodness takes root and develops. If we wish to lead a dignified and fulfilling life, we have to reach out to others and seek their good.³

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³ *Apostolic Exhortation: Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis, on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World, Section 2.9, page 9. Written on the Feast of Christ the King, 2013.