

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter (B)

2<sup>nd</sup> May 2015

'Election question time'

Acts 9: Saul preaches fearlessly    1Jn 3: Our love is to be something real and active.  
Jn 15:1-8: *I am the vine, you are the branches ...*

Navigating oneself through politics is always a challenge; but maybe the present General Election campaign has been even more complicated for this country's population. The party-political landscape is very different, even to what it was 5 yrs ago; and many of us might be left bemused. Now, it's not partisan of me to admit that the sitting MP Charles Walker has the 21<sup>st</sup> biggest majority in the country, so that the election outcome here in Broxbourne is rather likely to be a foregone conclusion. Nevertheless, when the local 'Churches Together' held a Hustings on Thursday evening, it was good to be able to hear all the different candidates' presentations of their parties' policies. Those who attended, I think, were encouraged by the civility of the discussions, and the passion too; courtesy as well as commitment between the candidates. I am privileged to have been involved in the planning of the event, and feel that it was a truly worthwhile exercise; a chance to scrutinize those who seek public office as an MP. It was a

shame that a 2-hr meeting does not allow scrutiny on all the possible issues that could arise in a 5-yr Parliament.

In their Election Letter to us, our bishops highlighted a number of important considerations as we prepare to vote. The first issue they remind us about is the most basic of all: that of the right to life. We have campaigned as members of this parish, over the last parliament, on a number of issues, especially highlighting gender-selective abortion; three-parent embryo creation; and euthanasia. Although the MP voted as we would have wished, to outlaw decisively gender-selective abortion; he did not vote to prevent 3-parent embryos. On the issue of euthanasia, legislation for which did not reach the House of Commons this time, the MP has not indicated any sympathy for helping people to be killed in old age. In fact, his personal family experience, as he related to me in a letter, would urge him in all probability the other way: seeing that despite chronic illness there can be immense, and irreplaceable, love and care generated in those close to a sick or dying family member.

Sadly, life issues did not get any ‘air time’ at Thursday’s meeting, though I had hoped they would. It would have been very good to have asked each one of them their views on euthanasia. We certainly need to pray for a strong moral stance of the Parliament about to be elected, since almost certainly there will be yet another attempt to introduce a debate on euthanasia in the next Parliament. We need our MPs to hold firm against the anti-life tide that is sweeping the Western world, attacking both the vulnerable unborn as well as the vulnerable sick, frail and elderly. The Catholic faith is unequivocal in its God-given opposition to any form of such taking of innocent life. We have much to pray about how this new Parliament will take forward legislation in our country — issues of the just and humane treatment of immigrants; questions of our place within the European Union; headaches such as how best to tackle the atrocities being committed by ISIL in Iraq, Syria, and Libya; concerns about preserving our freedom to teach Catholic truth in the context of our schools ... But as well as all this, we have to be alert to the threats to the natural

life of the sick and terminally ill. We pray that God might send his Holy Spirit upon the country this week, that MPs with a pro-life mindset might be elected to Parliament. The Church rightly sees that the right to life is the most basic of rights. If one is willing to compromise on the right even to life of a human being, then surely one is more likely to think and vote more callously on other matters concerning people.

It may well be that there is little uncertainty in the outcome of the election in Broxbourne constituency; but across the country there is a great deal of uncertainty. Let’s hold our nation in prayer in these days, and especially on Thursday. Our Lord Jesus calls us to be close to Him, to be His disciples, to keep His commandments: “Whoever remains in Me, with Me in him, bears fruit in plenty, for cut off from Me you can do nothing.” There’s no surer path to a happy society than to keep the Lord’s commandments; so let’s pray that voting according to real ethical values, rooted in God’s goodness, and not expediency or selfishness, will guide the people in this week’s Election.