

I read this week of a housing association employee who has been demoted from his job because of his views on gay marriage. Also this week, a government minister has been castigated for suggesting that the time limit for abortion should be reduced from 24 weeks to 12 weeks. Another politician described Mr Hunt's views as 'chilling'. And we are all familiar with the cases of people being disallowed from wearing crosses and crucifixes.

This is just the tip of the iceberg. They don't burn us at the stake or cut our heads off anymore but one way or another the Christian faith is in this country under threat. It is being quite insidiously undermined or ridiculed.

I was walking down the one of the many long corridors of the University Hospital the other day, making my way as quickly as I could to visit a sick patient when I was accosted by a young doctor who wanted to ask me some questions. From the tenor of his questions it was clear he was a devout and faithful Muslim. The burden of what he wanted to say was really this: Why are Christians so weak and feeble? Why don't Christians protest more against policies and media insults?

Pope Benedict has asked us to keep a Year of Faith. This is our moment. This is our opportunity – not to man the barricades and burn effigies of politicians we don't like – but to be quite firm and clear about our Faith and to articulate that Faith with conviction, to live by that faith and if necessary, to **suffer** for that Faith.

What we can't do, because that doesn't achieve anything, is to look back to a former age when the Church was a force to be reckoned with and people would take note of what Bishops and the Pope had to say. That world has gone. It is no longer possible or appropriate to 'lord it' over anyone, no longer appropriate to make our 'authority felt'. The way that Jesus wants us to evangelise and to lead our world out of darkness is by being servants and slaves, servants and slaves of God and of one another. *For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life for a ransom for many.*

Fr Michael