

Should we keep our nuclear deterrent? What sort of role should the UK play in the wider world? Do we want a United Kingdom at all, or should England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland all go their separate ways? How can we continue the economic recovery without making the rich richer and the poor poorer? How do we ensure that those in real need get the help they require? What sort of schools do we want? What is the purpose of education? Why are so many teachers leaving the profession?

And there's the Islamic extremists wreaking havoc and mayhem across large swathes of North Africa and the Middle East. Do we have some responsibility for this? What should we be doing about it? How do we balance a sensible immigration policy with compassion towards those trying to escape persecution and violence?

There are so many big issues we need to be talking about and yet this general election campaign seems the most boring that I can remember. Promises and false bribes is about the best they can do. Our politicians seem so shallow. They just seem to skate over the surface, carefully avoiding what really matters.

*"I am the vine and you are the branches"* is usually seen as a parable of the Church. And once we become *cut off* from the Church, we are *like a branch that has been thrown away – he withers*. Now I am certainly not suggesting that we should return to a time when the Church should call all the shots, to a time when politicians would cow-tow to priests and bishops. Far from it. But what I am suggesting is that our political leaders seem to have lost their moorings. They are no longer rooted in a tradition. They no longer seem to have a clear set of moral guidelines. The only faith they seem to have is in money, technology and image.

To create a society where people love and care for each other, *whose love is not to be just words or mere talk, but something real and active* requires faith and vision. We need to believe in something. We need to have a conscience. We need to have a hope that is not dependent on our own achievements.

The faith that we need is not necessarily a Catholic faith, or even a Christian faith. Maybe the vine of which we are part consists of all those people who believe that with God's help we can create a better world. Russell Brand thinks that voting is a waste of time. Extreme Islamists think voting is wrong. What we need is for men and women of faith to stand together, to affirm our faith in God, to affirm that in God we can really change things for the better, for *cut off from this faith we can do nothing*.

There is no definitive Christian answer to any of the political issues of the day. But what we can say, with confidence and conviction, is that this is God's world; that God loves this world; that God is with us on our journey...and that God is with us in the polling booth. By

the prayers of our Blessed Lady, by the victory of Our Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross, may that journey reach its true destination in the peace and justice that only God can accomplish. And make sure you cast your vote on Thursday.

Fr Michael