

8 September 2013

Regardless of one's political persuasion, it would have to be said that we have just been through one of the longest and most frustrating election campaigns in modern memory and, like the 2010 election, perhaps the least inspiring. I was having coffee with friends on Monday and they were saying the same thing, totally uninspired, really 'over it' and all waiting for some decisive result. Welcome to the world of short-term politics and the clever media grab. Although we all love to stick the boot into politicians, in the end, our political leaders simply reflect the constituents they represent. A friend of mine thinks that the level of political discourse in Australia is so bad that he finds refuge almost wearing out his DVD collection of the American political drama, *The West Wing*.

But why has it come to this? Are things really that bad? And who is to blame? I think I am still quite idealistic. I still think that politics is a noble profession that should be inspiring and call upon the better angels in our nature – to debate as adults, to lift the level of public discourse, to plan for the future with broad and inspiring vision. There are two places in the world that I have been to that truly made my heart skip a beat. The first was St Peter's Basilica in Rome just after I was ordained a priest on my very first trip overseas. It was quite surreal travelling from the airport in the taxi and seeing the dome of St Peter's getting closer and closer, then bigger and bigger. And for those of you who know the experience of walking into St Peter's for the first time, it is simply a breath-taking experience. But the other place where my heart skipped a beat was my first trip to Canberra and walking into both old and new Parliament House. That too for me was awe-inspiring being in the place where the great personalities and the great debates have shaped the nation that we are, where governments rise and fall often in dramatic circumstances, where elected representatives have come from the four corners of our land to build a strong, just and fair society.

I mention this because in today's Gospel, in the continuing discourse on discipleship, Jesus gives the example of a man building a tower, doing so carefully, with planning, with foresight and not in some half-hearted way. What nation are we building for the future? Who do we

want to be as a people? Are we building with integrity? Does this nation truly summon the best resources or is politics just a game of ten-second media grabs? Talking of building, it was inspiring to see during the week a reference on the internet to a Catholic secondary school in Sunshine called Marian College. In place of the Year 12 end-of-year schoolies custom of going away and getting hopelessly drunk, this group of students are going to Vietnam to help build a house for a family in need. A group of Year 12 girls helping to build a house. As inspiring as this is, these young women are also building vision, they are building leadership skills, they are building social capital, they are building a path that hopefully other young people will follow. How wonderfully inspiring? How wonderfully courageous to make such a counter-cultural decision? How refreshing to see a group of young people act with enormous integrity?

This is precisely what Jesus is calling us to do in the Gospel; to build with wisdom, to build with vision, to build with courage and determination, to build for the gospel and the kingdom, to build because this is what disciples do. Let us pray for those who will form the new government to lead our country. May they govern with wisdom and compassion, with integrity and justice for the common good of all. In the words of the former Governor of Victoria Sir James Gobbo who once concluded a very inspiring Australia Day address many years ago, 'God bless Australia. Keep her generous. Keep her free'.