

Dear Friends

I am hugely conscious of the privilege I have of addressing you this evening, not only on account of those whom I am addressing, but also on account of those I represent, the Church's constituency. Even if my words are drawn from a particular experience and reflect my own ecclesial community, they are intended to deliver a message on behalf of all and to express universal congratulations to you who have won the confidence of the electorate, and are, in a sense, dedicating yourselves this evening, in this historic place, to the service of the nation.

The First Minister, in accepting the endorsement of the people, spoke graciously of "fairly and wisely" governing with the "trust of the people – all the people ... with an eye to the future but a heart to forgive."

In politics differences in policy can sometimes translate into personal animosities. The avoidance of all such resentments calls for "hearts of flesh" as the prophet foretold.

We can be grateful that we have had the freedom to debate policies in respectful manner, vote without fear of intimidation, and accept readily the outcome of the vote. These are indications of a mature democracy.

The apostle Peter in the first letter ascribed to him in the Christian canon of scripture enjoins on us a deep respect for civil authority. He writes: "Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution". Obedience to Christ clearly carries with it, albeit at a different level, obedience to those who, in the providence of God have been given the role, as Scripture puts it, of "governors to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right". This calls for discernment and the consequent duty of protecting what is good and eradicating what is evil.

"Live as free men," says St Peter, "yet without using your freedom as a pretext for evil, but live as servants of God."

I hear in these words echoes of Jesus' words when he famously answered a trick question about paying tribute by saying: "Render to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's".

We have duties to the state, but never without a sense of the most fundamental of all duties, namely of fidelity to the truth and the pursuit of virtue.

Allow me to recall a particular memory. At Easter during my first year at the Scots College in Rome, I went with fellow students to Siena, now part of Tuscany but once an independent city state. In the Palazzo Pubblico, (the city chambers) I saw frescoes by such Renaissance masters as Simone Martini in 1315 and Ambrogio Lorenzetti in 1338.

Governments chosen by the citizens came and went in those turbulent times but the ideal of good government remained irrespective of party.

In the *Sala della Pace* – the room of peace – Lorenzetti painted three huge compositions, contrasting good and bad government. The councillors of the Republic pass in a long procession. The scene behind them – illustrate the prosperous effects of good government, showing loaded pack animals coming from outside carrying merchandise, and within the city itself craftsmen in their shops, the professor in his chair, and in the Piazza, young women dancing in a ring, as horsemen pass slowly by. In the countryside people are hunting and fishing. As Saint Bernardino remarked 100 years later: "All things seem joyful in time of peace".

A set of solid figures surrounding the prince or leader personify the virtues of Magnanimity, Temperance, Justice, Prudence, Strength and Peace. Above them those virtues which we call theological, since they depend upon an acceptance of God, are named and depicted as Faith, Hope and Charity.

The symbol of our parliamentary authority in Scotland, is not a frescoed chamber, but the beautifully executed mace. It too has the names of four virtues inscribed on it, 'Wisdom, Justice, Compassion and Integrity' variants of the four cardinal virtues - those on which all the rest hinge.

St Gregory the Great, the Pope who sent St Augustine to bring the Angles to faith, found himself, at a time of civil upheaval, the virtual governor of the city of Rome. He bemoaned the distraction from his priestly duties which such a civil role required, but he had the wisdom to pray that he might "see life whole" and that in responding to the demands of the powerful he might not deprive of their rights those who had expectations of their own needs being met.

In his teaching Jesus focused on those who delivered what they recognised as the needs of others and blessed them: "Blessed are the merciful, they shall obtain mercy; Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice for they shall be satisfied; Blessed are the peacemakers, they shall be called the children of God."

This provides not a "rights agenda" but a "virtue agenda" – and it is a "virtue agenda" that I would like to propose to you as newly elected members of the Scottish Parliament.

The common good will never be fully served unless those who govern are ambitious for the fostering of virtue in the community, and it is here that the state does well to recognise the support it receives from allied institutions and in return encourages their work.

In the last census almost 70 per cent of Scots considered themselves to be Christian. Churches which have over recent decades learned the lesson of ecumenism are well placed to welcome into the community those of other faiths and cultures, and, on account of the huge commonalities already shared, are natural agents of social cohesion. Throughout the whole of Scotland there are parishes served by priests and ministers who provide, in practice, a whole range of services from the physical to the social, the cultural to the spiritual.

David Bartlett, a commentator on the passage of scripture which has been our inspiration in these reflections, pointed out that the circumstances of Christians today are very different from those addressed in the letter of St Peter. "How does one move," he wrote,

“from an ethic to which a small minority in an empire adhered, to an ethic for at least a nominal [Christian] majority in the society we are now addressing?”

“In a pluralistic society, Christians will want to argue for what is right, but not to impose our understanding of it. Furthermore the Christian freedom to which [St Peter] points includes, at least implicitly, the freedom to dissent from the mandates of society.” *i.e.* if there is a conflict between being God’s slave and being a slave of the state

“Figures like [Thomas More and St John Ogilvie], Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King [and Nelson Mandela] and a host of the less famous stand as constant reminders that sometimes the demands of conscience require obedience to a higher ethic.”

The citizens of Siena were acutely conscious of religious freedom as a guarantor of good governance, and placed high on the facade of their Palazzo Pubblico, well above the coats of arms of their temporal rulers, the monogram of Christ.

I have one more reference to make to Siena, because until recent times the only person historians can identify as having visited Scotland prior to becoming Pope, was a man called Aeneas Piccolomini, sometime secretary to the Emperor and subsequently to the Popes, and of a Sienese family.

He came as an envoy of the Pope to the Court of King James I of Scotland, thereby assuring recognition on the part of the Papacy of the nationhood of the Scots and its independent regality. There are two memorials of his visit. The first is the beautiful fresco by Pinturicchio in the library of Siena Cathedral which shows Piccolomini (later Pius II) at the court of the Scottish king, in a landscape which, if truth be told, is more redolent of Umbria than of Scotland; and the second is the record he kept in his diaries which in recent years have been published under the title of “The Secret Diaries of a Renaissance Pope”.

Having experienced the reality of our climate he does not share Pinturicchio's imaginative vision of it! He writes: "It is a cold country where few things will grow. For the most part there are no trees." (He clearly never made it to the glorious countryside of Perthshire!). He could never forget how cold it was, when, having promised to make a pilgrimage barefoot to the nearest shrine of Our Lady if he were spared from death in the shipwreck by which he arrived in Scotland, he had to make a rather longer journey than he had anticipated. Unlike in his native Italy where shrines are rather more common, his longer trek was to Whitekirk in East Lothian – a visit still recorded there.

However he wrote well of the citizens of Scotland, "The men are short and brave; the women fair, charming and easily won." He made some comparisons with the English which perhaps are best, for diplomatic reasons, not given in full, other than to quote his observation that in Scotland "The oysters are larger than those in England and many pearls are found in them."

I don't know whether Pope Benedict XVI keeps a diary, but what I do know is that from all accounts he was greatly moved by the reception he received last year in Scotland. The warmth of that Scottish welcome and the success of the visit have been noted in many places and we must make sure that the reputation of the Scots for hospitality and good government is not marred by the few whose attitudes and antics are all too readily and sadly, widely broadcast.

Allow me to register to you who represent our people, the deepest appreciation of the Catholic community and its friends in the other churches and throughout Scottish society, for the welcome given to Pope Benedict XVI to our precious land on a beautiful and unforgettable September day.

And may the Lord's blessing be upon you in all the days to come.