

From The Vicar....

As I write, elections are due very soon to the European Parliament. For many people, this a big yawn! Politicians are in bad odour at the moment, with scandal surrounding the alleged abuse by MP's of parliamentary expenses, supposedly in order to engage in a little property development on the side. Pot-shots are being taken in the press, even aided by a former Archbishop of Canterbury whose unsolicited opinions are often found in the tabloids and on the rubber chicken circuit.

However, I argue that it is important to keep faith with politics, and to get out and vote. First, for a practical but very Christian reason. If there is a small turnout for the European election, it encourages small but motivated parties who *can* get their supporters out. In March, I was invited, along with other church leaders, to an anti-racist meeting in St Helens. There it was pointed out to us that because European elections are by proportional representation, a party has only to achieve 8% of the vote to get a member in the European Parliament for the Northwest. Once there, that racist party would attract European funding for their activities throughout the country. A larger turnout of people, however they vote, reduces the chances of a racist party getting a member elected.

My second reason for encouraging everyone to vote is ideological, even theological. Despite that bad odour in politics at the moment, I think that politics has, at its roots, the desire to serve the public good. It is a kind of vocation, calling, and I think that politicians, both local and national, for the most part are good people, dedicated to that public good at a considerable sacrifice of their time and energy. In their own particular way, politicians at their best are acting out the second commandment, to 'love your neighbour as yourself.'

A racist party does not love *all* its neighbours, not matter how much sugar-coating it puts on its message. I hope we all take the trouble to get out and vote – and of course the way you vote will depend on who you think will serve the public good in the best way. Surely the important thing is for all of us to make sure we *do* vote, and by so doing to do our best to ensure the public good ourselves.

At our Civic Service on June 7th, we will pray for politicians and the integrity of politics. Do come and join us and our local councillors, as we recognise the vocation of politics and seek the common good.

My love and prayers,

Stephen