

4th April 2019
47/2019

**THE ARCHBISHOP'S HOMILY DURING THE MASS FOR OUR COUNTRY
ON THE INAUGURATION OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF MALTA,
H.E. DR GEORGE VELLA**

Your Excellency, President Marie–Louise Coleiro Preca,
Your Excellency, President Elect Dr George Vella and Mrs Vella,
Honourable Prime Minister and Mrs Muscat,
Honourable President of the House of Representatives and Mrs Farrugia,
Honourable Ministers Members of the Cabinet,
Honourable Members of Parliament,
Honourable Chief Justice and Members of the Judiciary and the Bench,
Distinguished guests,
Brother Bishops,
Rev. Members of the Metropolitan Chapter,

It is fitting that we welcome among us our brethren representing Churches and Christian Communities residing in the Maltese Islands: Peace be with you all. It is a great pleasure for us to welcome among us as distinguished guests representing the Islamic Community: *Salam*; those representing the Jewish Community: *Shalom*; those representing the Buddhist and Hindu Communities: *Namastè*; and the representatives from other religions: Peace.

In the name of all the Maltese and Gozitan people I would like to thank Her Excellency Marie–Louise Coleiro Preca for the work and service she rendered during these past five years as President of the Republic. Your Excellency, may God be your recompense.

In the First Reading from the Book of Kings we meet King Solomon son of David. The name Solomon means 'Son of Peace', while the name of his father David means 'The Beloved'. For his parents, the birth of Solomon was a sign of reconciliation with God. During his reign, Israel was at peace and enjoyed prosperity and stability. God wanted to

find out what King Solomon valued most in his heart and He placed before him a choice. He told him to ask for whatever he desired. Solomon asked for wisdom and discernment. God's answer should be a lesson for each and everyone of us:

“Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, behold, I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you. I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that no other king shall compare with you, all your days. And if you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days” (1 Kings 3, 11-15).

When we seek wisdom so that we can see what is right and act on it, we are investing in the highest good. The economic prosperity of a country is placed on a sound foundation depending on how much its leaders seek first and foremost to embrace attitudes linked to what is wise and right. The same can be said for the reputation of the country: it is strengthened and grows depending on the priorities we have when we embrace the values of integrity, justice and solidarity. If the first or only thing we seek is gain or profits, democracy becomes a kerdocracy (a society based on a mad rush after profit) and from there on it is easy to slide into a kleptocracy (a society where power is in the hands of the greediest).

As Pope Francis explained so well in his Message for the 2019 Day of Peace: “The thirst for power at any price leads to abuses and injustice. Politics is an essential means of building human community and institutions, but when political life is not seen as a form of service to society as a whole, it can become a means of oppression, marginalization and even destruction.” As we heard today in the Gospel according to Matthew: “Whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave” (Mt. 20, 26b-27). Pope Francis continues: “In the words of Pope Paul VI, ‘to take politics seriously at its different levels – local, regional, national and worldwide – is to affirm the duty of each individual to acknowledge the reality and value of the freedom offered him to work at one and the same time for the good of the city, the nation and all mankind’”.

“In fact political office and political responsibility thus constantly challenge those called to the service of their country to make every effort to protect those who live there and to create the conditions for a worthy and just future. If exercised with basic respect for the life, freedom and dignity of persons, political life can indeed become an outstanding form of charity”.

“In this regard, it may be helpful to recall the “Beatitudes of the Politician”, proposed by Vietnamese Cardinal François–Xavier Nguyễn Văn Thuận, a faithful witness to the Gospel who died in 2002:

Blessed be the politician with a lofty sense and deep understanding of his role.

Blessed be the politician who personally exemplifies credibility.

Blessed be the politician who works for the common good and not his or her own interest.

Blessed be the politician who remains consistent.

Blessed be the politician who works for unity.

Blessed be the politician who works to accomplish radical change.

Blessed be the politician who is capable of listening.

Blessed be the politician who is without fear.

Every election and re-election, and every stage of public life, is an opportunity to return to the original points of reference that inspire justice and law. One thing is certain: good politics is at the service of peace. It respects and promotes fundamental human rights, which are at the same time mutual obligations, enabling a bond of trust and gratitude to be forged between present and future generations.”

We welcome the figure of the President of the Republic as a symbol of our national unity and our call to be a democracy based on the choice we continually make for what is right and our thirst and hunger for justice.

The fundamental role of the President of the Republic is to remind us by means of words, gestures and example that politics is above all a service without fear or favour, but with a real sense of responsibility, a real sense of service to the State and a big heart full of compassion.

The President of the Republic has the privilege to be the Head of State. We want to see in him a defender of Malta’s heritage in every sense – cultural, historical, artistic, architectural and natural. The President encourages us to defend, appreciate and promote all that is good and beautiful among us, all that we need to preserve for the benefit of future generations.

Your Excellency, dear President Vella, we cordially extend our best wishes to you at the beginning of your work and service as President of the Republic of Malta.

✠ **Charles J. Scicluna**
Archbishop of Malta