



## DOWNSIDE SCHOOL

*Hymn Practice – 24<sup>th</sup> June 2016*

I should think that most of us here are in a state of shock over the result of the EU referendum which was declared this morning, even those who were in favour of leaving. It is a decision which, I think, will have a major effect on all of our lives in the coming years and a date in history which we will look back on as significant.

Many will say and, I have no doubt, have said already what a great day this is for democracy. The referendum has been held and the people have had their say. Everyone's vote has been given equal weight and Britain has decided by majority decision to leave the European Union.

But I think today of all days we need to examine what we mean by the term Democracy! Is it simply a case of citizens freely making political decisions by majority rule? I think not. There are many decisions which the majority of citizens might make out of self-interest, to the detriment of a minority. In fact it is possible for 51 percent of the population to oppress the remaining 49 percent in the name of the majority. A society in which this happens will not be a happy one.

In a democratic society, majority rule must be coupled with guarantees of individual human rights that, in turn, serve to protect the rights of minorities--whether ethnic, religious, or political, or simply the losers in the debate over a piece of controversial legislation.

In a properly functioning democracy the rights of minorities do not depend upon the goodwill of the majority and cannot be eliminated by majority vote. The rights of minorities are protected because democratic laws and institutions protect the rights of all citizens.

Yesterday's referendum was won by a majority of 51.9 percent of who voted leave the European Union against 48.1 percent who wished to remain in it. I am in no way making any suggestion that those who lost the vote might suffer oppression but I think that it is imperative, as we move forward from this moment, from this democratic decision, that we keep firmly in focus all the aspects which define a democratic society. This is not a moment for triumphalism or sour grapes. It would be easy now for those who campaigned on the Remain side to sit on the side lines hoping for failure just so that they can be proved right. Likewise those who won might be tempted to dismiss the opinions of those in favour of remaining in the EU as invalid and worthless. This is not the way forward. Now is the time for each and every one of us to work for reconciliation and unity. It is essential that we listen to one another now, even more so in fact than it was in the lead up to the referendum.

We may as a nation have decided democratically to leave the politico-economic European Union, but we remain very much a part of the European continent and we must continue to foster good relations with our neighbours at home and in Europe and across the globe. Much of the debate prior to the referendum focused on appealing to people's self-interest which I found a bit unedifying and depressing. To counter that I thought I would read what to most of you will be a familiar passage and perhaps a good thought to keep in mind as we move into a new era for this country.

Just as there is an evil zeal of bitterness  
which separates from God and leads to hell,  
so there is a good zeal  
which separates from vices and leads to God  
and to life everlasting.  
This zeal, therefore, the monks should practice  
with the most fervent love.  
Thus they should anticipate one another in honour,  
most patiently endure one another's infirmities,  
whether of body or of character;  
vie in paying obedience one to another --  
no one following what she considers useful for herself,  
but rather what benefits another;  
tender the charity of sisterhood chastely;  
fear God in love;  
love their Abbot with a sincere and humble charity;  
prefer nothing whatever to Christ.  
And may He bring us all together to life everlasting!

Before I read Sunday's gospel I thought I would also read a prayer which has for a number of years been on the prefects' board. Some of you may have read it. It is a prayer for Europe written by Cardinal Martini. The democratic decision of the referendum was that we leave the European Union but today of all days let's pray for Europe.

*Father of mankind, Lord of history,  
watch over Europe  
to whom you have sent philosophers, legislators, wise people,  
forerunners in faith of your Son, who has died and has risen again.  
Watch over these peoples, evangelised by Peter and Paul,  
by the prophets, by the monks, by the saints;  
watch over these regions watered by the blood of the martyrs  
and touched by the voice of the Reformers.  
Watch over the peoples united by so many ties*

*but also divided, over time, by hatred and war.*

*Help us working for a Europe of the Spirit  
founded not only on economic agreements,  
but also on human and eternal values.*

*A Europe capable of ethnic and ecumenical reconciliations,  
ready to welcome the stranger, respectful of each person's dignity.  
Grant that we assume our duty with hope  
to inspire and promote an understanding among peoples  
which ensures in all the continents,  
justice and bread, freedom and peace.*

Andrew Hobbs, Downside School