

Ask what you can do for your neighbour

JFK (J F Kennedy former President USA) famously said, 'Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country'. His predecessor Abraham Lincoln quoted from the Bible, 'A house divided against itself cannot stand'.

As I write, the country is in the middle of an acrimonious general election campaign. The debate appears to be that of a house divided, full of attacks on the intentions and integrity of opponents. Sometimes I despair at what seems to me to be a division along the lines of the politics of greed and self-interest, and the politics of envy; proclaiming vote for us and this is what we will make your country do for you. St John Chrysostom declared, 'The sins of the rich, such as greed and selfishness, are obvious for all to see' but went on to condemn those of the poor who envied the rich as being equally consumed by greed.

A university teacher taught me to look at all sides of an issue. My fellow students and I prepared for a seminar knowing on entering his room he would tell us each what proposition we should argue for. He wanted us to have open minds and accept the validity of opposing interpretations. I try to understand an opposing political view rather than condemn those holding it. In my work I often negotiate with individuals who could obstruct the change I am trying to deliver; it is only by understanding the origins of their opposition that I can persuade them to cooperate. I try to apply that to all aspects of life.

Christ said the second most important commandment was, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' If more of us put doing something for our neighbours and community before self-interest, we might be rewarded with a less divided and happier country.

Paul Cuss

St Laurence Catholic Church

Petersfield