

EDITORIAL

If people were out walking the streets of Hong Kong early on Sunday morning 24 November, 2019, an amazing picture would have struck their eyes. Thousands of people were silently lining up on the streets. The line snaked around the corner to a polling place. It was Election Day for candidates to District Councils in the city. As one walked along, the same phenomenon repeated itself towards another polling station. The people in line were of all ages, young, middle-aged and old. All had a serious look on their faces. They seemed determined to exercise their basic right and civic duty to cast their sacred ballot for the candidates whom they considered best suited to fulfill their hopes for the future of their beloved city. One got the feeling that the Hong Kong citizenry was taking matters into their own hands, and that something historic was about to take place in the city that day.

Nearly 72 percent of the electorate voted, and 2.8 million ballots were cast. The pan-Democrats garnered 1.6 million votes, or 55 percent of the votes cast, while the pro-government candidates obtained 1.2 million votes, or 41 percent of those cast. The pan-Democrats gained control of 17 out of 18 District Councils. It represented an overwhelming victory for them. A paraphrase of Chairman Mao's famous line of 1 October, 1949 comes to mind: "The Hong Kong people have stood up!" The authorities cannot help but pay attention to the result. Of course, commentators have noted that only 14 percentage points separate the two camps, or only about 400,000 votes. So the pan-Democrats cannot be complacent about their victory, as their vote margins could narrow by the time of the next election.

On that Sunday the Church was celebrating the Feast of Christ the King. The Gospel at the Mass was the Evangelist Luke's account of Jesus' crucifixion. Most of the main actors were against Jesus. Pilate, the Roman Procurator, had put a sign on top of the Cross reading: "Here is the King of the Jews." The religious leaders shouted: "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Messiah." The soldiers also ridiculed Jesus, saying, "If you are the

king of the Jews, save yourself.” One of the criminals hanging with Jesus shouted at him, “Are you not the Messiah? Then save yourself and us.” Only the repentant thief defended Jesus: “We are deserving of punishment for our crimes, but this man has done nothing wrong.” Then addressing Jesus, he said: “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Jesus replied: “Amen I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.” (Luke 23: 35-43)

How apropos this Gospel was for Election Day in Hong Kong, for it has a message for both sides in Sunday’s election. That message is that if one desires to be a leader of people, he must be a servant to all. The second reading at the Mass from the Colossians describes Jesus as “making peace through the blood of His Cross.” (Col. 1:20) Like Jesus, His followers must work to bring about peace and reconciliation among all factions in society.

One year has passed since the signing of the agreement between China and the Holy See on the appointment of bishops (22 September, 2018). Readers may ask how do recent actions concerning the Church on the ground in China stack up against the expectation for fruitful results from its signing? First of all, no new appointments of bishops have taken place. Two new bishops have been installed, but their appointments were in the works before the signing of the Agreement. On the contrary, what is taking place is a campaign to register all priests and Sisters from the unofficial church, and make them join the patriotic association. There is also enforcement of the regulation to keep children under 18 years of age from entering the church or participating in church activities. Also in some places, officials are plastering the walls inside of churches with a picture of President Xi Jinping, and the campaign for sinicisation of the Church is in full swing.

The theme of this issue of *Tripod* is “Vocation.” We have articles on seminary formation in Hong Kong, Sisters in China renewing their identity, the vocation of deacons, and the life of former priests in China, plus a review of two generations of church leaders since China’s open door policy took effect. We also publish the transcript in English of a radio broadcast presented by John Cardinal Tong last October on RTHK.

May God bestow His blessings upon our readers at this Christmas season and throughout the New Year! (PJB)