

25<sup>th</sup> September 2020

## Supreme

**“Wisdom is the supreme part of happiness ...  
Great words of prideful men are ever punished with great blows,  
and, in old age, teach the chastened to be wise.”**  
*Sophocles, Antigone (The Theban Plays), No. 3)*

The recent death of US Supreme Court justice, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, at the age of 87 has been world news. Often labelled “The Notorious RBG”, *The Independent* newspaper described this remarkable woman as “a diminutive yet towering women's rights champion”. The Court's second female justice, she served for 27 years and has been righty and universally praised. Her death leaves a vacancy on the nine-strong bench.

The appointment of a Supreme Court justice in the US is a political question. The president makes a nomination and the Senate votes to confirm or reject the choice. Justices can serve for life, and, with RBG's death, the remaining balance is weighted 5 to 3 on the conservative side. The appointment of another conservative, such as the President is likely to choose, would give conservatives control of key decisions for decades.

The Cambridge English Dictionary defines “supreme” as follows:

### ***SUPREME***

#### ***adjective***

1. The highest rank, level, or importance
2. Very great, or the best

Surely “the highest rank” or “the best” carries with it concepts of integrity, fairness, balance, objectivity. But how can that be when the appointment of justices to a Supreme Court raises issues of a permanent bias and an ideological imbalance? I'm not attributing a lack of integrity to any individual. But I am questioning any system in which a built-in prejudice prevails. Might the motivation to maintain such a prejudice be dangerous?

Judgments are supreme when we accept “very great” responsibility for the good of all and not the few. Let's challenge political bias and ensure that, if we are to have the best, then “wisdom is the supreme part”. For, as Sophocles reminds us, we all need to be chastened to be truly wise.

#### **A prayer for today**

*Lord, let my supreme responsibility be to work for justice for all. Amen.*

*An original reflection by © Tom Gordon*

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