

Archbishop Thabo Makgoba
Diocese of Cape Town Synod: First Homily
**“Our Vision and Our Mission: God's Faithful People,
Loving and Serving God's Church and God's World”**
21 August 2009

Mk 12:35-44

³⁵ While Jesus was teaching in the temple, he said, ‘How can the scribes say that the Messiah is the son of David? ³⁶David himself, by the Holy Spirit, declared, “The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet.’ ” ³⁷David himself calls him Lord; so how can he be his son?’ And the large crowd was listening to him with delight.

³⁸ As he taught, he said, ‘Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the market-places, ³⁹and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honour at banquets! ⁴⁰They devour widows’ houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.’

⁴¹ He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. ⁴²A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. ⁴³Then he called his disciples and said to them, ‘Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. ⁴⁴For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.’ (NRSV)

May I speak in the name of the One God, who is Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of Life. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, last night for my Charge I used verses from Mark’s Gospel that were set for evening prayer. As the passages for today and tomorrow also seemed so apt, I thought we would continue with Mark’s gospel in our daily Eucharists and Bible Studies.

After breakfast, we will begin our working days by reading Holy Scripture together, in groups.

For it is God’s word which must always be our starting point, in our task of understanding our identity and calling, as the body of Christ for these times, for this place.

Today’s reading begins with Jesus teaching in the Temple.

He too is working with Scripture – quoting from the Psalms. But he challenges his hearers to look with fresh eyes at old familiar verses, and not to take for granted the interpretations with which they have brought up.

New circumstances – Jesus himself, in this case – require a rethink, even a reinterpretation.

It is a reinterpretation that holds onto the truth of the text itself – the verses from the Psalms – but with a whole new understanding of what these might mean in the context of the coming of God's kingdom.

Though the changes in our circumstances are not as radical as the birth of the Messiah, they are still quite drastic!

Are we ready to do a reality check on our reading and interpreting of Scripture, to ensure that how we understand our identity and calling are appropriate to twenty-first century democracy? – and not stuck in the old paradigms of the apartheid context?

What does it mean to be God's faithful people here and now? What does it mean to love and serve God's church, and God's world, here and now?

On the question of identity – of how we see ourselves and how we portray ourselves – the next paragraph of our reading has stark warnings.

And here I am, in fancy robes, seated at front! And don't we all like it, when we are recognised in the street, and greeted with respect!

But Jesus says we are not to be like the leaders of the world, who value smart suits and VIP reserved places and public applause. This is neither the source of our intrinsic identity, nor how we best communicate the essence of who we are.

Yesterday I spoke about how we love one another within the body of Christ: that is, on the basis of recognising that Christ dwells within one another, and is at work within one another.

This is one reason why I want us to spend time in Bible Study together – so we get that opportunity to know one another through more than the labels of which church we attend, what job we do, and so forth.

Rather, let the foundation of our relationship with one another depend on recognising a living relationship with Jesus Christ in one another.

Then let us build on this foundation in ways that encourage one another to grow in Christlikeness; and let our primary concern be to share this knowledge and love of Christ and his good news with the world around.

The third paragraph of our passage tells the famous story of the widow's mite. The poor widow gives to the temple treasury what, on the face of it, is a tiny sum. Yet this, says Jesus, given by someone poor and cash-strapped, is more significant than all the large sums put in by the rich donors out of their surplus wealth, their disposable income.

Let me draw out two points.

First, everyone can be significant. There is no-one among the baptized who has nothing to offer the life of the church and its mission in God's world.

The task for us as Church leaders is to ensure that this is understood with confidence by all the baptised.

Every Christian should feel empowered to serve the Lord, and know that, by the power of the Spirit, they can make a significant difference within God's world.

One does not have to be rich, or clever, or powerful. Whatever God gives us, we can let him use for his glory and for his kingdom.

And the second point is to underline the importance of good financial stewardship within our stewardship of all the gifts that God gives us. Are we tithing ourselves, as well as teaching that tithing is normative?

If it is taken for granted within our churches that we will all tithe, then there will never be any problem with resourcing the vision which we believe Jesus is putting before us.

Of course, as I have said elsewhere (including in the Chrism Mass sermon), my belief is that 'money follows vision'. It is by letting God inspire us with his dreams that we will find ourselves excited enough to make them our own, and motivated to pursue them with all that it takes.

So then, let me sum up the three themes from today's readings:

1. First, reading Scripture with fresh eyes – so we are faithful both to its text and to our context.

2. Second, Christian leadership based not on outward show, but on Christ-like service – and we must learn to recognise it, and encourage it, in one another, and make it the basis of our common life.
3. Third, the confident empowerment of all the baptized; everyone good stewards of the gifts they have, with tithing as our norm as we let God's vision inspire us.

Let these themes rest in our hearts and minds in the day ahead – in Bible Studies, in Discernment Groups, in discussing the Measures, in debates on Motions around pastoral care and health provisions, and the financial statements – and may these themes help us better discern God's hand upon our lives.

Amen.