

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

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Mk 13:1-13

As Jesus came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!’<sup>2</sup> Then Jesus asked him, ‘Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.’

<sup>3</sup> When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, <sup>4</sup>‘Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?’<sup>5</sup> Then Jesus began to say to them, ‘Beware that no one leads you astray. <sup>6</sup>Many will come in my name and say, “I am he!” and they will lead many astray. <sup>7</sup>When you hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. <sup>8</sup>For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs.

<sup>9</sup> ‘As for yourselves, beware; for they will hand you over to councils; and you will be beaten in synagogues; and you will stand before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them. <sup>10</sup>And the good news must first be proclaimed to all nations.

<sup>11</sup>When they bring you to trial and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say; but say whatever is given you at that time, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. <sup>12</sup>Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; <sup>13</sup>and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. (NRSV)

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

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ, today I want us to reflect further on how we understand the institutional church, and our public role as Anglicans within South Africa.

How has our identity and calling changed, with the coming of democracy?

During the struggle, we often faced hostility from the government; yet we were among civil society’s most prominent and respected leaders.

For some of us, to become a cleric offered both freedom to act and status that were unavailable in most other walks of life.

We were players on the public stage, locally or even nationally.

Democracy is different.

In multicultural, pluralist and increasingly secularised societies, differing legitimate perspectives nourish democracy. Individuals are free to pursue personal fulfilment in whatever way they choose.

The faith communities, including the churches, are often regarded as increasingly irrelevant.

How do we ensure that the Anglican Church of Southern Africa, and its Diocese of Cape Town, are more than just a monument to the past?

Are we like the disciples looking at the historic edifice of the Temple, and saying 'What large stones and what large buildings!'

Jesus response is a hard one: 'They will all be thrown down.'

But he also speaks of 'the beginning of the birthpangs'.

How do we allow ourselves to be reborn – painful though it may be – so that the good news of Jesus Christ is proclaimed afresh, and yet still authentically, to this new generation?

This morning I want to reflect on what are appropriate processes for us to address the questions raised in yesterday's homily: what does it mean to be faithful to the texts of Scripture, interpreting and communicating them appropriately within our new contexts, within contemporary culture?

All human life is found within some culture or other, and all faith is expressed within culture – only God stands outside of culture.

Our circumstances are a prism, St Paul's looking glass, through which we behold the infinite God who is beyond our finite ability fully to comprehend, and we strive to discern his truths more fully.

Scripture reflects the cultural contexts and understandings of those who wrote, and those they wrote about.

Jesus lived in the Jewish culture of the first century – a culture that was influenced by two other cultures: of Roman occupation and of Greek tradition. The way he spoke and taught reflects all three.

We also tend to think of St Matthew's Gospel as 'more Jewish', and St Luke's as 'more Greek' in their perspectives.

Our own understanding of Christianity is hugely shaped by the conversations of past generations of God's faithful people with the cultures of their day.

Greek philosophy influenced our earliest doctrinal formulations.

Later influences include:

- the social and political currents of the Reformation,
- the scientific advances and mindset of the Enlightenment,
- the manners of the Victorians,
- the convictions of the colonialists,
- the experiences of slavers and slaves,
- the many different traditions of African peoples,
- and the views of countless others who passed through, or settled in, the Cape over many centuries.

Every culture has both good and bad, and needs to be measured against the gospel of Christ.

What tools shall we bring to bear, in order to work out what is Christ-shaped, and to be embraced and nurtured, and what is to be rejected?

The Anglican way has been to start with scripture, interpreted through tradition and reason – and remember that reason includes reflecting on our experiences of all of life.

We have sought to recognise how the eternal truths of God have been expressed through the centuries and cultures in which Scripture was written, and been realised in the life of God's faithful people over two millennia since.

Sometimes the church has had to learn from new cultural movements.

The institutional church argued for centuries that slavery was clearly upheld in Scripture, and, apart from some important individuals, was

generally slow to acknowledge that the abolition of slavery was a better reflection of Jesus' promise of liberty for the oppressed.

But sometimes the Church has been badly influenced by culture.

The Churches acquiesced in overturning the centuries-long Biblical prohibition on usury. But charging unrestrained interest on loans, and the greed this has fuelled, are major factors in everything from the global credit crunch to world poverty. There, I think, we got it wrong.

Our Gospel tells us to put our trust not in the large stones of the Temple, but in Jesus as our corner-stone, our touch-stone.

Sometimes it helps to ask 'What would Jesus do?'

On the other hand, I heard recently about a child who said 'I don't know whether to watch a DVD or play on my play station – and it's no use asking what would Jesus do, because DVDs and play stations weren't invented then!'

So in looking to Jesus, we have to go deeper. What principles might we bring to bear from his teaching? Good news for the poor, freedom to the imprisoned, sight for the blind, liberty to the oppressed – yes, all that.

And then there is love for our neighbours, whoever they might be – and, as the parable of the Good Samaritan reminds us, they are not restricted to 'people like us'.

Jesus seems to have had a special welcome for the marginalised, the excluded, the stigmatised – welcoming lepers, consorting with drunkards and prostitutes.

He condemned religious hypocrisy, especially upholding the letter of the law while disregarding its spirit.

Yet he was also uncompromising when it came to the spirit of the law, saying he had come to fulfil, not abolish it.

We might also remember St Paul's advice, to dwell on all that is true, honourable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, excellent or worthy of praise.

Certainly, I hope that in our debate today we will not be rising up against each other, as Jesus warned can happen!

Let us instead draw on Southern African culture's best teaching on debate.

Rather than follow a more westernised model of 'for and against', let us rather 'take counsel together' as the people of God, more in the manner of indaba, lekgotla and bosberaad.

For we are all members together of the body of Christ.

We are all on the same side, all of us 'for' the same thing: discerning God's truth so we may follow Christ faithfully in our Diocese in the years ahead.

So let us pray that we might all find ourselves open to the leading of the Holy Spirit, who will, as Jesus promised, teach us how to speak, as we tackle the challenging issues before us.

Amen.