

Archbishop Thabo Makgoba
Installation of Mpho Ndebele as Lay Canon
and Chancellor of the Diocese of Cape Town
St George's Cathedral
24 January 2010

Ps 7
Is 47:1-15
Mk 7:31-37

'He has done everything well – he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.'

Lord Jesus Christ, open our ears to hear your truth; unstop our mouths to speak your words; and set our hearts on fire with love for you.

Dear brother and sisters in Christ, it is a great joy to be here today.

Mpho – dear friend, dear sister in Christ, who has also been to me so often, a mother in God – I congratulate you on your appointment as Lay Canon and Chancellor of the Diocese of Cape Town.!

I also want to congratulate the Diocese on making such a clever move!

We could hardly do better than bring Mpho's experience, wisdom and faith into the counsels of our Church in this way.

Those of you who know her as a former Warden of the Cathedral will have no doubts about Mpho's considerable gifts, and her generosity in sharing them with God's people and God's church.

The role she played in chairing the Committee preparing for the election of a successor to Archbishop Njongo on his retirement is just one of the many tasks in which she has served the Diocese in the past.

I am sure our future will also be enriched by having Mpho alongside the new Chapter that will soon be appointed.

So we pray God's generous and overflowing blessing upon you, Mpho; and ask that his blessing may overflow through you into every area of our life and mission across this city.

The Deaf Hear, the Mute Speak

Our New Testament reading offers guidance on how we should bear the responsibilities of Christian leadership

Indeed, its lessons are true for all Christians, as we participate in the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ to the world.

Jesus heals a deaf man with a speech impediment. The crowds respond with words that echo the book of the prophet Isaiah, Chapter 35.

It says this:

'Here is your God ... He will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.' (Is 35:4-6a)

Mark's gospel has already given accounts of the lame leaping; now the deaf hear, and the mute speak – and the next chapter will recount the return of sight to a blind man.

All these are marks of the Messiah, who brings God's kingdom.

God's kingdom is for us: it is for us to receive, and it is for us to share.

First, we need to receive the gift of hearing – to hear what the gospel of Jesus Christ has to say to us, to our personal circumstances, to the situations in which we find ourselves in.

And second, we need to have our mouths unstopped, so we too can 'sing for joy' and share this good news with those around us.

I have been struck by how this has been true in my own life, in many different ways, just this week.

Christian Leaders – Hearing and Sharing Christ's Voice

On Monday and Tuesday, I was at a consultation of Christian leaders, from across the whole body of Christ: Roman Catholic and Evangelicals;

Pentecostals and the African Instituted Churches, and everyone in between.

In this regular, informal, gathering we are learning to listen to what God has to say through one other, and to all of us together.

This week, many people came believing God was urging us to pursue far greater unity and cooperation.

In the past, the spectre of apartheid provided a focus for cooperation, despite our differences.

But with apartheid over, thank God, we need to find a new basis for coming together.

Yet no external common cause, like that of apartheid, has proved satisfactory.

What we heard, and recognised in a new way on Monday, was that Jesus Christ is – of course – the basis of our common life.

For it is as members together of the body of Christ that we belong together – with all our distinctives, even if some of us are awkward elbows, or knobbly knees.

So we are planning to come closer to one another, through sharing more deeply not only what we do, but who we are, in Christ.

Having had our ears opened in this way, we hope we can now go on to speak more effectively – demonstrating our unity in Christ, even in our diversity.

For actually, it was Jesus himself that we most needed to receive in a new way, and in turn must share with the world. We should not be shy to make him the central platform of our lives and our mission.

Ukhahlamba – Listening to the Still Small Voice

I had a different experience of listening and speaking on Wednesday and Thursday, at the electoral assembly convened to choose the first Bishop of the new Diocese of Ukhahlamba, created from the northern part of the Diocese of Grahamstown.

In the event, the assembly decided not to elect a bishop, but to ask the Synod of Bishops to make an appointment.

Sometimes, deciding to do what seems to be 'nothing' takes considerable courage.

It is a reminder to unstopped ears that God's voice is often still and small, and may say 'Wait'. We must learn to listen carefully, and not be afraid to share that 'wait' with others.

Please keep the Synod of Bishops in your prayers as we seek good priest and pastor for all God's people in Ukhahlamba.

Haiti – Listening and Speaking in Solidarity with God's Suffering World

This week many of us have been concerned to listen and speak – and of course, act – well in our response to the disaster in Haiti.

We need to listen to what is most needed – whether the urgent response of disaster aid, or in the long reconstruction process ahead.

On Friday, I was glad to lend my voice in endorsing the 'Africa for Haiti' Campaign launched Mrs Graça Machel.

Our continent has received so much support over the years. Now we must stand in solidarity with the people of Haiti, and do what we can – including urging our own leaders at the African Union Summit next week – to make tangible and generous commitments.

This requires careful, respectful, listening to Haitians themselves, about their needs and priorities for their own future.

We can also listen and speak, in solidarity with their pain trauma. Through joining in lament, we can both allow ourselves to be drawn into their tragedy, and share in proclaiming that God listens to all who suffer.

Weeping with those who weep is a holy way of listening and speaking in response to disaster.

Cape Town Stadium – Listening and Speaking in Multi-faith Contexts

It has been a busy week – yesterday I joined other faith leaders to bless Cape Town Stadium before the opening game.

Religious communities share so much, especially in addressing increasing secularism. Yet inter-faith events can require careful handling – as this Cathedral well knows.

This is another context in which we must seek to hear God's message to us, and how he would have us share it.

I was glad to be the Christian voice in the Stadium's opening.

Alongside the shared general affirmations of hope for the future, I unashamedly asked God's blessing, in the name of Jesus, and by the power of the Spirit.

We should not be afraid to make clear the distinctives of our belief in the God who is Trinity – Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer of life - and the salvation and redemption that come through the cross and resurrection.

My particular prayer is that in 2010 God may bless all who compete and those who spectate; and inspire us all to reach for excellence, to promote fair play, to share in team spirit, and to enjoy together the great gifts that sport brings to all of humankind.

In the past the Cathedral has found many ways of speaking God's joyful message to the city around. I pray that this year may bring new opportunities for those who enter these walls to find their ears opened to hear the voice of Jesus.

Davos – Listening and Speaking for the Sake of the World

My listening and speaking does not stop today!

On Tuesday I travel to Switzerland, for the annual meeting of global leaders in the World Economic Forum at Davos.

I am glad to say that faith leaders are increasingly seen as having a vital contribution to make to this gathering.

This year many of our debates will revolve about how to align economic policy-making with more fundamental 'values', in human life and society – regardless of whether you can easily put a dollar price tag on them.

This will be a huge challenge – please do pray for me, and for other Christian leaders, as we try to listen to God’s word to the Forum, and to share it with joy and with conviction, with those we encounter.

Looking Ahead – in Province, Diocese and Cathedral

And of course, these themes of listening and speaking will continue through the year, with Synod of Bishops next month, and Provincial Synod in September!

They are central also for the new Chapter, taking forward all the work we have been doing in developing our Diocesan vision through to 2019 and how we deliver it across the varied circumstances of our parishes and city.

It will also be central to the task in which Diocese and Cathedral share, as the Dean retires. Mr Dean – we shall miss you hugely, but I shall save my words for you until the appropriate time comes!

We here will have to listen carefully to God’s leading on who should next take up this post – someone who, like you, Mr Dean, can themselves listen clearly to the Lord; and someone who is not afraid to speak clearly, joyously, both to the Christian community, and into our city, in which this Cathedral plays such a significant life.

I shall have you all much in my prayers as this process unfolds – and I ask that you in turn will hold in your prayers all those who share in this responsibility.

Mpho will of course be one of those – so please remember her especially, today and in the weeks and months ahead.

May she grow in learning to listen to God, and in speaking his words with joy.

May she be an inspiration to the rest of us, in teaching us, and modelling for us, how we should do the same.

And may our Lord continue to work among his people – unstopping our ears, and giving us tongues to sing for joy, for his praise and for his glory.

Amen