

**Archbishop Thabo Makgoba**  
**Diocesan Staff Eucharist, Zonnebloem**  
**Wednesday in Holy Week**  
**31 March 2010**

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Is 50:4-a  
Heb 12:1-3  
Jn 13:21-30

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

The anonymous writer of the letter to the Hebrews tells us to 'look to Jesus' as we persevere in the life of faith, running the race that is set before us.

'Consider him' he adds, 'who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart'.

For those of us who work for the Church in one capacity or another, one of the most hurtful things we discover is that the extent of the hostility that we sometimes receive from within the Christian family!

It surprised me, when I became a parish priest – it got worse when I became first a suffragan and then a diocesan bishop; and you can only begin to imagine some of the post I receive now!

Amidst all the joys of Christian life and service, this can certainly get us down – and if it is not hostility, then sometimes the long hard slog of keeping the wheels turning causes us to become weary and lose heart.

Holy Week is a good time to stop and consider the burdensomeness of life, even the life of faith lived in the service of God's Church.

Our starting point must be that we are human – only human – and so is everyone else. And the Church is composed of entirely of such human beings!

Therefore it is inevitable that all of life will be messy, imperfect, and worse – for we are all sinners.

Yet when we describe ourselves, and others, as sinners, we must remember this is a theological description of the way we are – it is not a moral judgement, through which pronounce condemnation of others, and especially those with whom we disagree!

And it is to save sinners, that Jesus came – his incarnation, cross and resurrection are the perfect gift of divine love that is tailor-made for sinners.

Therefore, in the struggles of human existence, it is to Jesus we must ‘look’.

We must ‘consider him’, when we are faced with the realities of our lives as individuals, in our communities, and in our institutions, including the church.

We look to him in his incarnation – taking on himself all that it is to be human, all the complications and mess and heartache of the human condition.

We have a God who truly empathises with us – who understands what it is that we go through – both good and bad.

So great is his love for us, in the struggles of life, that it took him to the cross for us.

He did for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

He knows that none of us, by our own efforts, can be entirely good – and nor can we persuade others to be entirely good; none of us on our own can overcome the weariness that sometimes besets us.

So we also look to him in his Passion and his cross, and his resurrection. Here he shows us that all that is at work within humanity to bring us down, does not have the final victory.

The final word is not that we are condemned sinners, but that we are redeemed sinners, and the power of life at work within us is greater than the power of death.

This has struck home to me in a new and forceful way as a result of my time in Haiti.

I expect – I *hope!* – you have read my ‘To the Laos’ for March, in which I try to put into words the enormity of what I saw there.

I must say, I was almost overwhelmed by the scale of the tragedy brought about by January's earthquake.

I encountered death and destruction that was almost impossible to grasp, even as it was there before my very eyes.

I cannot describe my emotions, seeing bodies trapped in buildings from which it was too dangerous to move them, feeling my nostrils fill with the stench of rotting flesh.

I travelled there to give what support I could to the Anglican Bishop and his people. Yet I found myself learning from their faith in the midst of such heartbreak.

One afternoon Bishop Duracin showed us his lovely home, totally collapsed with all his possessions destroyed, and his car completely flattened. 'Everything is gone, gone' he said.

He wept as he showed where his wife had been trapped (she was later flown to Florida for medical treatment and for weeks he was denied a visa to visit her). I wept too.

Then this brave man pointed to all he had lost and said 'We still have to sing alleluia, for in the midst of this, Christ is risen.'

He, his clergy, his people, are proclaiming alleluia in they way they live now.

They weep with those who weep, and mourn with those who mourn, and they preach that those who were killed are now safe in the eternally loving arms of God.

Yet they also act so that new life can begin, right now, and unreservedly, for those who are left.

Church hospitals are again up and running – in massive marquees. New homes for the disabled have been found. Schools are operating in the tent cities.

The church, feeling strengthened by God and his love, offers a purpose and direction that the government is failing to provide.

This is what it means to be an Easter people – proclaiming life in word and deed, even in the face of death.

There is an important message here for us in Cape Town.

I realised this week, with something approaching horror, that, given that I shall be celebrating my half century later this year, this is actually my 50th Easter.

The story of the Christ's Cross and Passion is such an old and comfortably familiar one that I have risked being anaesthetised to its true force. It is hard to feel the overwhelming shock with which the truth of the resurrection hit the disciples.

Yet this year, the complacency into which it has become easy to fall, has been challenged by the Christians of Haiti.

In particular, I have found myself wondering whether I have not only become complacent about the story of Easter, I have become complacent about the ability of God to bring resurrection life to all that brings destruction in our own society.

Have I become so used to living in the midst of poverty, illness and death, crime, corruption, that I underestimate the power of God to bring redemption; and that I fail to hear his call to be an instrument of this new life?

And as I read today's gospel, I wonder if this complacent familiarity is in a sense my own betrayal of Jesus Christ, and all that he died for?

So I thank God for the privilege of meeting Bishop Duracin, his clergy and people, and for being shown by them how to appreciate in a new way the power of life over death.

They have taught me to look with fresh eyes at Jesus, and what he has accomplished as the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.

So let us this Holy Week once again 'consider him, who endured so much – so that we may not grow weary or lose heart'.

Let us learn to say, with a fresh new understanding, alongside the Christians of Haiti, 'Alleluia, Christ is risen – we are risen, Alleluia'.

Amen.