

Archbishop Thabo Makgoba
Diocese of Matlosane – 20th Anniversary Eucharist
5 December 2010

Isaiah 11:1-10;
Rom 15:4-13;
Mt 3:1-12

May I speak in the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ; dear people of God of the Diocese of Matlosane; dear friends and guests and visitors, let me again say it is a great joy to be with you today.

Thank you Bishop Stephen, thank you, clergy and people of Matlosane, for inviting us all to share with you as you celebrate the twentieth anniversary of this diocese. We offer you our warmest congratulations.

Let me particularly say a word of welcome to [*VIPs – Bishop Stephen to advise*] ... I also want to extend a warm welcome to those who have come from overseas – including our friends from the Dioceses of New York, and Lichfield (England), [*?? especially to the Bishop of Lichfield – might be a suffragan??*]

In our second reading, St Paul prayed for the Christians in Rome that God would encourage them to live in harmony with one another – and certainly, in celebrations such as this we feel uplifted by sharing together in our gratitude for all that God has done for us.

Before I say more about gratitude to God – which is one of our themes this morning – let me also record thanks to those who have made this celebration possible:

- to Bishop Stephen and his team, and all who have in any way been involved in the service;
- and to Tlokwe and Matlosana Municipalities for their generosity in supporting these 20th Anniversary celebrations.

We thank God for the opportunities he gives to us to share generously with one another, and so to build up the body of Christ – to strengthen the life of the church, and its witness and ministry in the community, as we are called

to share with others the love and compassion that we have ourselves received.

There is so much to be thankful for.

God has been faithful to us, through good times and hard times, and brought us to this point of celebration, in harmony together before the Lord.

It has not all been easy – and we know there are many, many challenges for today and for tomorrow.

But we celebrate, because God is with us – and we know that, as we go forward, he will stay with us, and continue to lead and guide us.

For the celebration and harmony we share today, which is God's gift, is a gift with a purpose.

St Paul's prayer for harmony continues like this:

May God ... grant you to live in harmony with one another,... so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our harmony – and the purpose of all unity between Christians, whether within our Anglican congregations and churches and dioceses, or between Anglicans and others – is to point others to God, and to his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

You may remember that Jesus prayed for the unity of his followers, at the Last Supper. He asked our Heavenly Father that we might all be one 'so that the world may believe' that he truly is the Messiah – sent by God to redeem the world. (Jn 17:21)

This is our task – always and everywhere it is the task of God's people.

We, who have come to see and recognise Jesus as our Saviour and Lord, are to share the good news of the gospel with those around us.

In some ways we are all called to be like John the Baptist, who pointed others to Jesus, as we heard in our gospel reading.

We are to heed his call, to prepare the way of the Lord and make his paths straight.

We are to do whatever it takes, so that others can find a clear route, an unhindered way, to Jesus.

For Jesus is the one who brings good news to the poor; who proclaims freedom to the oppressed; who binds up the broken hearted; who meets the deepest needs of our souls, our inmost beings; who takes away the sins of the world and promises us forgiveness and new beginnings whenever we need them, provided we put our hand in his, and walk in his ways.

And we know that there are so many needs in this Diocese – needs of poverty, of health, of service delivery, of social justice.

We know that the legacies of the past leave many wounds – from the economic injustices and problems of unemployment; through to the deep divisions between communities, and the breakdown of trust between those who ought to know themselves as children of God, brothers and sisters together in the human family.

For all this – for all the burdens that we bear – Jesus is the answer; and it is Jesus we preach.

And we do so in confidence, knowing that, whatever our circumstances, he will come to us and meet us, and call us to follow him and find the path forward: the path of love and compassion, the path of healing and wholeness that is his desire for us, and the gift that he offers to us.

This is true for his people of every age, in every place.

So we, the people of God in this place today, are challenged to listen to God and know what these gospel promises might mean, in our own circumstances.

In other words, we ask God for his vision for the specific ministry to which he calls us.

Twenty years ago, there was a vision for the division of the huge Diocese of Johannesburg, and new Dioceses came into being.

I remember well, how many hopes and dreams there were in those days.

Some of those dreams have been fulfilled; some have not; sometimes God has taken us on paths we did not expect; sometimes the journey was harder than we thought.

And perhaps sometimes we have not followed as clearly as we might – perhaps we have not shared sufficiently in the harmony of which St Paul wrote: sharing not only what is easy, but also what costs us.

God calls us first to be generous with one another, as Jesus Christ shares himself with us, without reserve – so that together we may be generous to others.

Generosity comes in many forms – it may come in the vulnerable and honest sharing of who we are with one another: particularly striving to get to know those who are different, those with whom we might not immediately get on.

The God of reconciliation encourages us to model his reconciling love to a world which still struggles with difference and division.

‘Welcome one another’ we heard in our epistle reading ‘welcome one another, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.’

Be encouraged by his call to share yourselves generously.

And he calls us to be generous with our other resources – some have time, some have money, all have gifts which he gives to us for the building up of the church, and for its mission in the world.

These are our riches – and no diocese should feel the need to measure its success against another in financial terms. Rather, we should be rich in Christ – whose immeasurable generosity knows no bounds.

And so he says to us ‘Freely you have received, so freely give’ (Matthew 10:8).

As we share ourselves, we will find ourselves sharing Christ, with one another, and with the communities around us.

At Advent we particularly think of Jesus as Emmanuel – God with us.

Those among whom we live, most of all need to know God is with them – Christ, who took on human flesh and became incarnate sharing in the

fulness of the human condition; sharing even death – and then rising so that he might bring us the redemptive promises of heaven.

So , as you meet today, and as you go forward from here, I challenge you to consider what is God's vision for the years ahead. How will you share Christ, and the fulness of his gospel, in every area of life within this Diocese, in the next decade?

As some of you may know, at the Provincial level we have been seeking God's vision for us over the last two and a half years.

When I was installed as Archbishop in March 2008, I spoke of the need for us to 'seek afresh to discover what it is to be the body of Christ in our time, and who God is in Jesus Christ, for us here and now'.

In the following two years we followed a deliberate process of prayer and of taking counsel together, to discern God's call to our Province.

Finally, two months ago, at our Provincial Synod, we affirmed the Vision we believe the Lord is putting before us.

This is threefold:

First, we are to be Anchored in Christ – as revealed to us in Holy Scripture.

Jesus Christ alone is Saviour and Lord, the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

It is not naïve to say that, to a very great degree, Jesus truly is the answer to all our central questions of life: whether we live in a rural village or the inner city.

In Christ, our vast and diverse Province finds its unity and identity – not in rallying around some common enemy, as was so much the case under apartheid, but coming together in harmony (which is not the same as uniformity), welcoming one another so we may share God's generous love, shown to us in Jesus Christ, with his world.

This leads us to our second priority. We are Committed to God's mission. Whatever God calls us to do and be, our answer should be 'Here am I, send me; here we are, send us.'

Third, we are to be Transformed by the Spirit.

Through our openness, our willingness, to be transformed, God will equip and empower us to embody and proclaim the message of his redemptive hope and healing for all people and for creation.

Anchored in Christ; Committed to God's Mission; Transformed by the Spirit.

A, C, T – in other words, 'Anglicans ACT'.

Upon this basis of being Anchored, Committed, Transformed, we have developed this Mission Statement:

Across the diverse countries and cultures of our region, we seek:

- To honour God in worship that feeds and empowers us for faithful witness and service
- To embody and proclaim the message of God's redemptive hope and healing for people and creation
- To grow communities of faith that form, inform, and transform those who follow Christ

We have identified, at the Provincial level, eight priority themes for Anglicans to ACT – or, to put it more accurately, for us to act at the Provincial level in ways that can support and encourage the priorities of each Diocese in its ministry and mission.

For we know that each Diocese is different, and each Diocese has its own vision from God. Each Diocese must listen to Jesus' call, 'follow me', in relation to its own circumstances.

Matlosane is not Mozambique – but nor is it Cape Town or Angola or Christ the King.

Your task, with your Bishop, is together to discern God's call.

And our role as Province is to support you, in those areas where the Anglican Church of Southern Africa is best served by taking that broad perspective.

So therefore, at a Provincial level we are looking at these priority themes:

- Liturgical renewal for transformative development
- Theological education
- Leadership formation

- Health, including HIV and AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria
- The environment
- Women and gender
- Protection and nurture of children and young people
- Public advocacy

Two further themes – transformation, and holistic mission rooted in a full commitment to evangelism – run through and undergird all these, rather than being matters to address separately. We must also keep in mind the imperatives of justice and reconciliation, gender equality, poverty, and youth.

Some of these may be near the top of your list – I know there are issues with young people and drugs and alcohol, for example; and with public advocacy and the need to pursue social justice in service delivery and in meeting the needs of rural communities and farm workers.

I know that HIV and AIDS is also a major concern – and there are ways of promoting health in other ways, including the development of vegetable gardens, in back yards, on church premises, and wherever nutritional needs can be supported in this way.

[? summarising thoughts]

So as we thank God for the last twenty years, we look forward in confidence, knowing that Jesus whom we remember at Advent as Emmanuel, will be with us today, tomorrow and for always.

May you be blessed – and be a blessing to those to whom he sends you.

Let me end with the prayer of St Paul, with which our epistle reading ended:

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen, may it be so.