

Archbishop Thabo Makgoba
Renewal of Vows: Maundy Thursday - Sea Point
Eucharistic Spirituality: Reflections
21st April 2011

Isaiah: 61:1-9

Psalm: 89: 21-27

Revelations: 1:4b – 8

Luke 4: 16-21

May I speak in the name of God, who anointed His Son High Priest of the New Covenant. Amen! Dear colleagues, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our Collect boldly claims that “we are consecrated to share as faithful witnesses to Christ’s saving work”. What might this mean, as we renew our vows today?

Before I turn to this, let me first say what a delight it is to be here, and to see almost all the clergy of this diocese and some retired clergy as well. Thank you all, for your ministry and our partnership in what God is up to in the various communities that we serve and in the world. A special thanks to Bishop Garth for his leadership among us – to Chapter and all the various bodies and ministries within the diocese. Archdeacon Karl Groepe, Fr Isaac Haynes and your parishioners, thank you for opening St James’ parish for us today and for all the preparatory work for this service. On the 22nd May 2011 at 15h00, we will be instituting Moruti Michael Weeder as Dean of our cathedral of St George. You are all invited. Pray for Michael, Bonita, and their children Chiara, Andile and Khanyisa, as they assume this specialized ministry. Please pray for us as we prepare for our diocesan Synod, to be held from 25 to 27 August at St Cyprian’s Retreat. The Summons for Synod has been sent and I hope you have elected or soon will elect your representatives to synod.

What might it mean being consecrated to share as faithful martyrs to Christ’s saving work, as we renew our vows today? It might mean that we are renewing our commitment to serving: renewing our identity in serving, as well as deepening our understanding of why we are serving. We serve for Christological reasons, because Scripture says “the Son of man came to serve and not to be served”; and our ecclesiological understanding is to build the body. The Anglican Prayer Book and the introduction in today’s liturgy, just before we renew our vows both say that the body is built when we show forth in his name the sacrifice of our redemption, as we set the Eucharist before God’s family – that is, through the paschal meal; as we lead His Holy people in love, nourishing them with His Word; and as we help strengthen them with the sacraments. This is an enormous responsibility that gives us a new self-understanding: an understanding that our (human and often feeble) work and will, through the grace of God can and do mediate the work and will of God. We, thus, are rededicating ourselves anew to the continuation of the mystery of the Incarnation, and our role in these mysteries. We gather as those “consecrated” or set apart to share as faithful disciples of his saving acts and as priests of the New Covenant. St John Chrysostom says “if you are renewed, you can’t remain the same.” We too cannot remain the same.

Anglican Archbishops Ramsey, Fischer, and Williams, as well as our own Archbishops Tutu and Ndungane, in their writings and ministries provide a helpful context within which we can understand ourselves as we continue this faithful work of service, worship and witness. Their work and theological understanding of God in the public space, endow us with sound biblical, ecclesiological and Christological bases for self understanding as we renew our

vows. Their work is aptly summed up in a very readable book by Ramsey – *The Christian Priest Today* – when he refers to the ‘4 in 1’ unchangeable marks of a priest. That is, a priest is: a minister in teaching; a minister for reconciliation; a minister for prayer; and a minister of the Eucharist. Put in missiological terms, in these tasks we recognize what Bosch described as the three dimensions of the Church, the body of Christ, namely the ministries of kerygma – proclamation, preaching and teaching; of diakonia – serving; and of koinonia – communion with God and the rest of God’s community.

With this understanding, it makes theological sense to combine the renewal of the priestly vows and the vows of those called to the diaconate. By doing so, we are affirming that all of us are able to exercise the ordained ministry because, through our baptism, God befriended us. We too befriended God. Through his Son’s atoning and redeeming work, we continue as His disciples in spite of ourselves and who we are, and of what we may want to become. Through his saving grace and his Holy Spirit, our dismembered body (that is, our identity) is healed, formed into His likeness and made whole.

However, today, I want to focus on our role as ministers of the Eucharist: those who show forth in his name the sacrifice of our redemption, as we stand before God’s family; and on our role as ministers of reconciliation. Of course both of these roles are undergirded by prayer and scripture. As ministers of the Eucharist, each time bread and wine are sanctified, we too are sanctified. We are made one body with Him and, as we always pray, we are one with his people of this and every age. Thus, in celebrating the Holy Mysteries, the Mass, the historical – with its anamnestic and epicleptic realities – is renewed and turned into the “now”, into how we are called to be and ought to be. As someone said, a human being is a human being and must be a human being; and so we catch a glimpse of what is “to come”, that is, the eschatological perspectives. Together with those that the Eucharist is offered for, present and not present, we become incorporated into this mystical union and catch a glimpse of the “grace and peace from Him who is and who was and is to come ...” Rev 1:4b

As we receive the Word and Sacrament, the incarnate God – in the Father’s incarnate Son – dwells in us. The Holy Spirit gives us a new identity, in their likeness. In this way, we cannot and dare not privatise faith. When God, who is community, dwells in us or when the Spirit of the Lord God is upon us, (Luke 4:16ff / Isa 61:1), as the Spirit was also upon Jesus, the impact is felt beyond us. Our neighbours feel it too.

What impact does our neighbour feel when the “unrestricted presence of God, the creative and life giving Spirit” is upon us? Our hymn today reminds us, the hands that Holy Things have taken are “strengthened for service”. For where the incarnate word of God – the incarnate Christ – is, there is His scarred and wounded body: healing the sick, comforting the sad, accepting the excluded and marginalised, and driving demons out through his Word and his closeness to God the Father. Surely, this is what we are renewing ourselves for! We are recommitting ourselves to peace-building in his steps; to reconciling others after his example; to bringing hope and dispelling fear following the demands of his Word; to renewing the face of the world; and to building His body.

When we preside over the paschal meal, God’s family meal, the meal for all, we are showing forth the sacrifice of our redemption. We are made in harmony with a God who transcends race, sex, class and all artificial man-made divisions. We are renewed by the Spirit of the Lord God, sparing (or empowering?) us to continue to challenge individualism, arrogance, corruption, greed, self-serving or serving only friends and family at the expense of the poor. When the Spirit of the Lord God is upon us, we are called and sent, over and over again, to make Christ’s being real in our world and to share the implications of the paschal meal in our world. Being fed and nurtured by this meal in transformative worship constantly sends us into the world to build communities of love, compassion, and fearlessness, because we are not doing our will and work, but continuing in the will and work of God.

After celebrating a lunch-hour Eucharist on Monday at the Cathedral, I confirmed the invitation to go to Ficksburg on Tuesday. I went there to visit the Tatane family, following the brutal murder of their loved one, Andries, by our police. I went as the Anglican Archbishop, but also as patron of the Election Monitoring Network and chair of the Eminent Persons' Group. Please join me in praying for our poor communities like Meqheleng, and Khayalitsha and our informal settlements in particular, and support them in their call to have their human dignity respected and their basic needs met. Join me in loving our neighbour as ourselves, including the police who killed Andries, even as we challenge their disproportionate use of force and their militarized approach that 'shoots to kill' even an unarmed Ficksburg civilian. Let us affirm and call for a renaming of our police services back to 'safety and security' and not a police 'force', for this force seems to maim and kill rather than offer safety and security.

St John Chrysostom says "what plunges us into disorder is not so much our sins as our despair". Therefore, as those set apart and consecrated to witness to His saving acts, and strengthened for service, we cannot shy away from becoming signs of the divine, of the hope we find in the broken and risen body of Christ in the world. As ministers of the Word and Sacrament who "take, bless, break, and give" in remembrance of his saving act, we must will and work for Christ's atoning and redeeming work; remembering that when one suffers, we all hurt. We thus cannot afford to leave any area without witnessing to Christ's liberating presence.

The list is long but let me mention a few examples as I end. We cannot allow Julius Malema, and his gun-wielding theatrics, to compromise the space where justice is perceived to be uncorrupted. We cannot fear to raise the ethical/moral dilemmas of our day, even as unworthy servants: issues such as drug abuse and related crimes; abuse of power and state resources; and the cancerous greed of the elite in South Africa, Swaziland, Zimbabwe, to mention but a few. We cannot remain silent in the face of wars and killings in Libya, Afghanistan, and elsewhere; or the illegitimate development and use of power; or the post-election burning of Churches in Nigeria. We can't be indifferent in the face of inequality; or at the marginalisation of religion and morality in schools; or where the environment continues to be polluted and energy wasted by a few in the world.

The Spirit of Lord God *is* upon us, refreshing our tired bodies and restoring our true identity in Christ; in alleviating the hurt, pain and suffering among His people through us; and in continuously consecrating us as faithful martyrs of His saving acts. May you be blessed this Good Friday and have a good, and joyous Easter. And please don't forget to vote – and vote responsibly! Amen.