

Archbishop Thabo Makgoba
College of the Transfiguration
2018 Graduation Ceremony
13th March 2018 @14h30

Readings: Jeremiah 17:19-27; Ps 78:19-27; Mark 8:1-10

I greet you all in the name of God, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer of our lives. Amen

Dean of the Province and Chair of the College Council, Bishop Stephen, Bishop Ebenezer, the Bishop of Grahamstown and other bishops present at this milestone in the life of our Province, members of the College Council, Bishop Bethlehem, Bishop Gath, Bishop Dino, Bishop Monument, Dean Hunter, Sharon Nell, Prof Antrobus, Registrar, the Rector, Dr Kgabe, staff, students, graduates, your families, invited guests, ladies and gentlemen.

It is an honour and privilege for me, as the Visitor to the College, to speak at this graduation ceremony and to celebrate with you the 25th anniversary of the College of the Transfiguration.

During the past months, as I have approached the 10th anniversary of my installation, I have been wrestling with what my theological emphasis as Archbishop of the Province and an archbishop in the Anglican Communion should be at this time. During my time as Archbishop I have done some work on Workplace Spirituality, on Faith and Economics, on Faith and Courage and on Incarnation and Politics. But I have a strong passion for education generally and theological education in particular. As a teacher and counsellor, pedagogy is very important for me; also important is what it means to be fully human.

When forced to choose a discipline, theological ethics will feature, along with the disciplines of systematic theology and practical theology. These lenses aid me in wrestling with the Bible. And I have a particular and specific concern for what Anglicans are accused of being biased towards, and that is the doctrine of the Incarnation.

Theological education equips us to embody and proclaim the message of God's redemption and healing for people and creation as well as to honour God in worship that feeds and empowers us for faithful witness and service. Dear friends, the modalities may vary due to our different contexts but in spite of these, we are all formed by our education and sent to proclaim these eternal, changeless truths to all and to feed on and be fed by them.

As you might have noticed by now, for me theological education is not about creating a band of elite clerics who are invisible during the

week and seen only on Sunday. Nor is it a sanctuary for those who do not have the courage to face life's challenges. The opposite is true: theological education equips us with wisdom, God's wisdom to be loving pastors and shepherds of all, soaked in prayer and seeking God, and dedicated in to peace and social justice without fear or favour. Equally, it equips us to know when not to feel obliged to act, but rather just to come alongside God's people, to be present with them when they are in need, holding them up as they seek God's wisdom in their situations.

When I have spoken previously in this chapel. I have posed questions asking what kind of priest we are training at CoTT and what our understanding is of the contexts in which they will be ministering. I have laid emphasis on a number of areas, such as theological education and education more broadly and on our political contexts.

In addressing these, I said we need to explore how we can encourage families of ordinands to help in training and forming our clergy, and to explore options for funding training, including partnerships and formation in an ecumenical context. Today I want to ask: how far have we gone with that?

I have also spoken of the need to explore the best that information technology can offer us, of course noting that nothing can or should replace human contact in the art of formation. I referred to the E-Reader project we started at Bishopscourt and wonder today,

how far has that initiative gone towards addressing that need and helping our students?

I have emphasised the importance of prayer and Bible reading ahead of elections in our countries; that we should drink from our spiritual wells, engage our consciences and be guided by these rather than fear and blind loyalty when we make our mark on a ballot paper. What have we learnt from that, especially as we in South Africa approach the 2019 national elections? And what lessons can we draw from our mistakes?

On one occasion in this chapel, I addressed the Synod of Bishops' concerns on an Anti-Homosexuality Bill in Uganda, which was a gross violation of human rights. In our own context in Southern Africa, the bishops resolved to intensify the dialogue over our response as Christians to the debate on human sexuality both within Africa and in the wider Anglican Communion. In engaging this debate, I said we ought to be guided by the imperative to love our neighbours. The debates culminated in a motion that was tabled at Provincial Synod in 2016, and more recently I have appointed a Commission on Human Sexuality to take the debate further in the Province.

Today at this graduation, we meet to celebrate with the college 25 good years of service to the Church across Southern Africa as our only provincial residential college. So, after a quarter of a century, where do we stand? Building on the pioneering work of the founding

principal, Luke Pato, now Bishop of Namibia, and his successors – and most recently, the fine work done by Prof Barney Pityana and Dr Kgabe – you are indeed a premier residential centre for theological education, developing a reputation as one of the leading institutions for training in Africa, respected across the Communion.

We have a website that enables communication to be effective between students here and anywhere in the Communion. The college is registered with the South African Qualifications Authority for theological education, which gives it great potential to do even better in the future. To cap it all, today I will be capping for the first time in the history of the college those that have completed their Bachelor's degree.

Of course, just as other churches in Southern Africa, we face big challenges in the field of theological education. Right now one of them – fortunately one of a completely different kind to the one CoTT has – is staring us in the face, and that is the crisis over the future of the Bransby Key College in Mthatha. But we are doing all we can to address the challenges.

To help overcome our financial difficulties, Dioceses have been challenged to make monthly donations over and above student tuition costs, and Bishop Ebenezer chairs a fundraising committee for the college. Notably, a commission chaired by Prof Pityana has been put in place to come up with innovative thinking and soul-searching on

how we conduct theological training and ministerial formation in the future. Among issues the commission will examine is a possible radical structuring of theological education, the question of student-teacher ratios, the importance of residential training and the all-important issue of how to finance it. It is our hope and earnest intent that CoTT will continue to thrive as a centre of training for future clergy amidst the challenges we face.

Today's Gospel reading (Mk 8:1-10) presents to us the story of Jesus feeding four thousand people. Although there are striking similarities between this account and the feeding of the five thousand earlier in Mark's Gospel, (Mk 6:34-44), they are two distinct incidents, as indicated by the fact that Jesus himself refers to two different feedings. The differences in detail are as definite as the similarities.

Since the incident took place in the region of the Decapolis, the crowd was probably made up of both Jews and Gentiles. Decapolis was a league of free cities characterised by high Greek culture. The league stretched from a point northeast of the Sea of Galilee southwards to Philadelphia and all but one of the cities were east of the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River.

In the earlier incident, Jesus initially showed compassion for the crowd because they were like sheep without a shepherd, beginning – as the text says – by teaching them many things. Now he has compassion for the 4,000 because they had been so long without

food, for three days – much longer than in the case of the 5,000, who had gone without for hardly a day.

The significance of this later occasion is that Jesus was still among the Gentiles, to whom the bread of life is to be offered as well as to the Jews. The disciples' questioning reflects their inadequacy, their inability to do anything, and their acknowledgement that Jesus alone could feed the people. They had not forgotten his feeding of the 5,000 and were probably giving him back the responsibility of procuring bread. Alternatively, their questioning may reveal their spiritual dullness – or maybe they were just slow learners.

As you who are graduating today contemplate Jesus's ministry to those crowds, I would urge you to turn inwards and examine your own intentions for your ministry to God's people, and how your education here at COTT fits into your vocation.

What are you graduating for? Is it to have a collar around your neck? Are you desirous of ordination for reasons of social status or money? What have you gained throughout your stay at CoTT? Are you transformed enough to hear, respect and address the needs of those who will cross your path in your ministry?

As we leave this college, are we able to identify the ones who need to be helped? As we will be celebrating TB Day this month, are we able to hear those who suffer from TB or are HIV positive? Do we

know our own HIV status? What is our feeling about gender-based violence? Are we able to hear the cries of “Karabos” of our time?

We are going out to serve people who need support from government, such as young children who have passed their matric exams and have no means to further their education. What will be your solution to their predicaments? What other issues that are challenging our broader church?

These are the questions we all have to wrestle with as we leave college and return to our Dioceses for ordination. We need pastors whose concern is not for themselves but for the people, pastors who know where the bread of life is needed. We are today charged with the responsibility to feed God’s people with his Word, and to soak our lives in prayer in order to be of assistance to them. By meeting this challenge, the great pastors of our church will emerge from among you ranks.

In closing, let me convey my and the Church's congratulations to you who are graduating tonight, and also to your families who have given their love and support to you during your time here. Congratulations to CoTT too for the achievements, past and present, which this ceremony highlights.

May God lead us well and equip us for the journey ahead into the mission fields he sends us to. May we be able to fulfil God’s mission in responding to God's call to noble service in God's church.

God bless.

Amen.