

**ARCHBISHOP THABO MAKGOBA**

**FUNERAL OF THE REVD TERENCE DOUGLAS WILKE**

**St George's Cathedral @11h30**

**01<sup>st</sup> MARCH 2018**

*Readings: 1 Cor 15:20-26,35-38,42-44a, 53-58; Psalm 150; Luke 14: 15-23*

May I speak in the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, our comforter and friend whom Terence so faithfully loved and served.

Amen

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ; dear Rosemary, Jean, Matthew and David, dear family and friends, dear colleagues and guests from near and far – it is very difficult to be here today to say farewell to our beloved friend Terry.

St Paul says “For since it was a man who brought death into the world, a man also brought resurrection of the dead. As in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be brought to life.” (1 Cor.15:21-22) If these words were ever true for anyone, they are most certainly true for Terry.

Yet our hearts are heavy and we struggle to grasp that we shall not hear his voice again, nor find ourselves enveloped in his huge embrace – an embrace of love that went far wider than the

considerable reach of his arms. This was evident in how as a youngster, Terry used to embrace children from Kliptown and Orlando East in Soweto without considering their skin colour.

Friends, we are here today to bring to God our grief and to give thanks to God for the life of a dear friend, a son, a husband, a father and a priest in the church of God. We extend our profound condolences to you, Rosemary, to your children, and to your whole family. May Terry's death not separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Terry has touched many lives through his ministry amongst us, as can be seen through the presence of all of you here today. The grief and heaviness of heart we all experience tell the type of a person he was.

The Psalmist in today's reading begins by stirring us up to praise God, to praise God for his sanctuary and the privileges we enjoy by experiencing it, and praising God is what Terry's life was all about, at Bishops and beyond.

Brothers and sisters, those who praise God in heaven behold displays of his power and glory which we cannot now conceive. The greatness of his mighty acts is known in his earthly sanctuary. The holiness and the love of our God are more evident in how God redeems us than in all our works.

Let's praise God with strong faith, praise him with holy love and delight, praise him with entire confidence in Christ; praise him by rejoicing in his love and comforting ourselves in his goodness.

As the Psalmist says: *Since we must shortly breathe our last while we have breath, let us praise the Lord; then we shall breathe our last in comfort.*

So let us hear God's words of comfort to us – the words of Christ who has gone before us, who tasted death and opened the gates of glory beyond for all believers. Terry, we know, now has fullness of abundant life that we have been promised. And even as we believe that, Jesus – who wept at the grave of his dear friend Lazarus, though knowing he would rise – understands our tears. In him we find a safe place to bring our weeping for our friend.

When I think of Terry, I think of his immense generosity, his loving, caring and self-giving, as a friend, a colleague and a pastor. And Rosemary, we could all see that he was no different in marriage. Our hearts go out to you, your children and the family today – especially after what you went through during Terry's illness. We hold you in our prayers and in our love.

We would also like to thank you for sharing him with us – especially that he was able to become such a father figure to so many. More than anything else, Terry would extend a helping hand prayerfully to those who came to him, as is well known at Bishops.

Prayer is the best response in everything that happens to us in every area of life, and I know that because I could see its effects in Terry's own life.

Prayer and spirituality – these words are inadequate to describe the relationship that Terry sustained and persistently deepened with God, who is love, and who dares us to open ourselves to receive that love. Terry took that risk and opened himself to God's love. One could tell that here was a man who spent time, real quality time before God, with no pretences, with no excuses; just opening himself up to receive whatever the Lord had for him.

I am talking about Trinitarian love – and I could feel it when I visited him on Ash Wednesday in hospital. That 'wonder of Trinitarian love' had grasped Terry in the very core of his being. He loved to speak of the experience he had with Christ, into the very fullness of the dynamic love that flows between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God's overflowing love, reaching out unconditionally to everyone, as our gospel reading told us, flowed through Terry, similarly unconstrained.

It was exemplified in Terry's important work especially at Bishops and in relation to others with whom he worked. In his own words, "This really helped shape my outlook and attitude on life. It was perfect grounding for the values I cherish that all are equal before God". Such love also fuelled his unstinting work as a psychologist – counselling, trauma debriefing and forensic assessments.

As a pastor, his approach was that all should share in God's banquet. Today, as we celebrate this Eucharist, we know that Terry shares with us, at the wedding feast of the lamb. For, as St Paul reassured us in our first reading, death is swallowed up in victory which is given to us through the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Friends, the ways of life and death remain so much beyond our comprehension. We find it so unfair, so unjust, that someone who was making such a tremendous contribution to the furthering of God's kingdom should suffer illness as he did. We find it more than irrational that he should die when there seemed so much more for him to give.

However, St Paul adds that 'In Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.' (1 Cor 15:22) And yes, even in my sadness, I already see something of this. It is as though Terry for so many years taught us by example how it is that we should live. And at the end, he also taught us by example how it is that we should die.

(POSSIBLE OMISSION)

We could see that he trusted in the promises of God which St Peter spells out for us in his first letter:

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he gave us a new birth into a **living hope** through the

resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into **an inheritance that is imperishable**, undefiled and unfading, kept in heaven for you who are being **protected** by the power of God through faith for a **salvation** ready to be revealed.." (1Pet 1:3-5)

Terry knew, and wanted us to know, as Peter goes on to say, that, though we do not see Jesus now, we believe in him; and so we can rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for we are indeed receiving the outcome of our faith, the salvation of our souls. (1 Pet 1:8,9 paraphrased)

(END OF OMISSION)

Today's Gospel (Luke 14:15-23) gives reference to the Messianic banquet to come. Association of the future kingdom with a feast was common during Jesus' time and he used this story as the occasion for a parable warning that not everyone would enter the kingdom of God. The initial invitation to the banquet should have been accepted by all who received it, but when the final invitation came, other interests took priority. None of the reasons given for not attending was genuine. For example, one did not buy a field without first seeing it, nor oxen without first trying them out. Without explicitly mentioning them, Jesus was warning the Jews that refusal to accept God's invitation would result in their rejection and the inclusion of Gentiles instead.

If Jesus was to extend the same invitation to you today, what would be your immediate response? Would you be like the ones with excuses? Or would you embrace it wholeheartedly? Or to bring the message to the here and now, let's take as an example the South Africa of today, when President Ramaphosa has invoked the words of Isaiah, saying "Thuma Mina, Send Me. If you were to be asked to allow yourselves to be sent to be servants of the people, what would you say to our country at this time of change in leadership? What would you tell President Ramaphosa? Are those invited to share in the banquet as members of the executive (ministers and deputy ministers) ready to accept the responsibility of showing God's embracing love for the needy, the vulnerable, the social outcasts and the abused?

Today we are all invited to the banquet. So in memory of Terry, who gave so much for God, may we all today take a resolution to be the bearers of God's embracing love to the world for Christ's sake.

Sisters and brothers, let me end with words that were spoken by Jesus himself – but words which could just as easily have been said by Terry, because they seem to sum up his life: "I seek not to do my own will, but to do the will of him who sent me" (Jn 5:30)

Well done, good and faithful servant, may you rest in peace and rise in glory.

Be blessed.

Amen.