

Archbishop Thabo Makgoba
Chrism Mass and the Renewal of Ordination Vows
5 April 2012

Isaiah 61:1-9; Revelation 1:4b-8; Luke 4:16-21

May I speak in the name of the living God, who is, and was and is to come. Amen.

[Expressions of thanks to all who share in the work of the Diocese, and to all who helped in the preparation of this service.]

Once again we hear those familiar words, from Old and New Testaments: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me'. The Spirit of the Lord comes upon Jesus Christ, so that he might fulfil his calling. And we believe that the Spirit of the Lord comes upon us, so we, in our turn, too may fulfil our own God-given vocation.

God's Spirit comes upon all Christians – dwelling within each one of us, as signified in our baptism. And we pray for God's Spirit to come in a particular way upon those called to ordained ministry. But we also believe God's Spirit comes upon the body of Christ, so that together, we, his church, may also fulfil our God-given calling.

It is easy to forget this, in our individualistic society. But today is a good day to consider this, as we come together specifically in the Eucharistic fellowship of the Diocese, in the *koinonia* of communion, in which we are inevitably bound with one another through together being 'in Christ'. Looking back, and looking ahead, as my fifth year here begins, I am confident of the work of the Holy Spirit among us – indwelling our structures, our processes, our institutional life.

I reflected on some of this at Diocesan Standing Committee – how we have moved forward with a sense of doing 'service delivery with the gospel' within our churches, within our city, especially through the life that God's Spirit is breathing into Chapter 20 of the Diocesan Acts, with its provisions for various task teams. We have made huge progress with the Social Development Forum. We are taking important steps forward with music and liturgy; and with corporate governance practices – King III, the Audit Committee, and the Remuneration Committee. We are now seeking out skilled individuals to serve on these, and on the Stewardship Giving Committee. And though we are budgeting for a deficit in running costs this year, this does not undermine the bigger picture which is that our overall Diocesan finances are actually in a very good place. Through all of these, and through the 'Renew Africa Season' that will begin later this year, we are strengthening our capacity for renewal and growth.

And so we see the Spirit's work among us, not only in what we see as the obviously 'spiritual' - being rooted in Scripture and in prayer – but also across the whole breadth of the life of faith, the life of 'worship, witness and service'. This calls us to be faithful stewards of our resources – and I don't just mean the environment, though that is vital, but in the ordering of our time, our working lives, our critical engagement

with society. We must use all these resources well, so that we can strive towards our God-given potential, to fulfil our God-given vocation of preaching redemption from sin and death, and demonstrating God's limitless loving care for God's people, and God's creation.

God's Spirit is upon us, calling us forward, often into untrodden territory. God's Spirit challenges us to use old tools to dig deep and find newness of life. God's Spirit is pressing us to have a prophetic ministry – perhaps declaring the gospel in new areas.

For myself, I had not expected when I came to Cape Town to spend so much time on questions of water and sanitation – which has led some to call me 'the toilets Archbishop'! Yet I am sure that Jesus, who was not afraid to embrace unclean lepers, would not have held back when seeing people in such need; with their safety and dignity compromised by the lack of these basic constitutional provisions.

And I did not expect to spend so much time with the Press Freedom Commission (and I am happy to say we have now sent our report for editing and printing; and I hope you will read it when it is published). The same is true of opposing the Protection of State Information Bill. Yet Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life – and so how can we allow the suppression of the truth, which will only undermine the ability of our society to live in ways that promote abundant life for all?

Within the Church, as both ACSA and our Diocese move from vision and planning to implementation, I find myself called to spend more time and energy on fund-raising. I also find I need to do more reflecting and acting on how faith relates to money and wider economic questions – which, I have to say, is an area I generally prefer to leave to others!

To be a Christian, to place ourselves in the hands of the living God, to be open to his Spirit coming upon us, is a risky business! It is to lay ourselves open to being taken outside our comfort zones. This is as true of us as congregations and Diocese, as it is of us as individuals. And it is as true of our outer lives as it is of our inner spiritual journeys.

There is no part of our lives – together, or as individuals – in which God's Spirit will not interfere! He interferes for our own good, and for the good of those to whom he sends us! Therefore, today, we recommit ourselves to live dangerously, following wherever God's Spirit leads!

This requires us, in our busy schedules, in the turmoil of changing society, to make space and time to be open to the Spirit coming upon us; to listen to that still, small voice; and to be ready to respond when we hear the call 'follow me'. There should be no tension between preaching the good news of eternal life and the coming of God's kingdom; and the living out of the kingdom's eternal values, such as justice and mercy – in whatever circumstances we find ourselves.

Sometimes, I know, I get the balance of life wrong – in my spirituality, and in how I direct my time and energies. And when I get it wrong, I feel it. Imbalance in my

spiritual equilibrium tells me; unease in my body tells me – and my staff and my family tell me too, often in more explicit ways!!

But the answer is not to draw back, and attempt to live a safe life on the surface. There we are too much at the mercy of being tossed about on the ups and downs of the waves caused by the fickle changing winds in today's turbulent world. Instead, we need deeper sea anchors – that reach down into the bottomless depths of God's flowing Spirit – depths where we perhaps cannot see clearly, but where we feel the certainty of God's presence, steadily engaging us.

St Augustine said that the presence and knowledge of God is 'both sought in order that it may be found more sweetly, and found in order that it may be sought more eagerly'. The more we find him, the more we yearn for him, and the more we seek him – this is surely the pattern of our lives. For, as St Augustine also said, if we think we have understood God, then what we have understood is not God – for God is always taking us beyond ourselves, and beyond our capacity to pin him down.

We need to remember this, for sometimes it can be dangerous to say 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me' – for it can tempt us to believe that we have somehow 'arrived'. Yet becoming a Christian, or being ordained, is not an arrival – it is a beginning!

So, on the one hand, all Christians are to follow Jesus Christ, empowered by the same Spirit, in bringing good news wherever there is impoverishment; in proclaiming release to all who are held captive, imprisoned, trapped and confined; in declaring the recovery of sight to the blind, and so forth. But on the other hand, we also still need to keep hearing this good news, in finding release, in having our blindness healed, and so on.

Indeed, I have been personally challenged by this realisation, in pondering what it means to do 'service delivery with the gospel' at the level of parish / pastoral charge and local community; and of individuals within parishes / pastoral charges and local communities. If we want individuals and communities to know and experience for themselves what such promises mean, it is not enough for us just to declare them. We too must model what it means to receive the gospel, and go on receiving it in ever greater fullness.

Do we, as clergy, as Christian leaders, show our people what it means to acknowledge our own poverty and receive God's good news? Do we demonstrate in our own lives God's release, God's liberty, from what holds us back, from what oppresses or traps or constrains us? Do we live allowing our own blind spots to be touched, and have our eyes opened to new ways of seeing? Do we show that we are prepared to be taken outside our comfort zones – in our inner life, and in our outer life – following God's calling, however disconcerting? And do we help the communities within our local churches demonstrate what it means to receive the good news of the gospel – so that we can be a model for the wider communities around us to receive this good news?

I suspect it is sometimes far easier to preach these things to others, than to receive them ourselves! But if we are not open to receive, how can we expect others also to receive?

Perhaps this Triduum, the challenge for us who are preaching and teaching is to listen for ourselves to the word we believe God is giving us to share with others! Perhaps in the next few days we need to reflect more not on how we can bring this good news to others, but more on where we need to receive it ourselves. For we know that there is no limit to the redemptive work that God desires to do among his people – until everything in heaven and earth is reconciled to God by the blood of the cross (Col 1:20).

So this year, let our lives not only reflect what it means to communicate the continuing work of Christ's passion, his death and resurrection – but also what it means to receive that continuing work within our own lives: as clergy, as Christians, as congregations, and as a Diocese. In the coming days, we shall, with great solemnity and great joy, commemorate the glorious story of our redemption through Christ's death and resurrection.

My prayer for us all is that our lives may be places where the unfolding of this glorious story, this holy mystery, may be truly visible.

So may we be those, of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke in the last verse of our first reading: 'All who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the Lord has blessed.' And may we bless others, by showing them how they too may receive God's blessing. A holy and blessed Easter to you all. Amen