

Archbishop Dr Thabo Makgoba
Requiem Mass for Deane Yates – St John’s College
21 July 2012

Ps 139: 1-11, Rom 8: 31- 39, John 6:37-40

May I speak in the name of God, from whose love, nothing in life nor death can ever separate us.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, dear friends, let me say again what a privilege it is to preside at this Requiem Mass for such a remarkable man. Let me especially welcome Deane Yates’ sister, Margaret Smith, and the wider family. Our love and prayers are with you. I also wish to thank you, Headmaster Roger Cameron, for hosting us today, as we honour your illustrious predecessor. I am also glad to acknowledge the presence of past chairs of Council, including those I worked with when I was myself a member of Council: Dru Gnodde , Stuart Morris, and Michael Spicer. I also welcome the clergy who are present, including the Dean of St George’s Cathedral in Windhoek – the Very Revd Michael Yates, no relation, who was a pupil here when Deane was head. And of course we welcome the wider circle of St John’s friends and family.

Two years ago, it was my great privilege and honour to speak at the funeral of Dot Yates – and it is an equal privilege and honour to speak of Deane today. When I look back on Deane’s life, perhaps the phrase that most springs to mind is ‘Holy courage’. He would have stood shoulder to shoulder with St Paul (and Dot would of course have stood with them), in saying, as we heard in our first reading, ‘If God is for us, who is against us?’

Deane lived that message through and through – he could not be daunted. When he knew what was the right thing to do, he went ahead and did it. We have heard so many examples of this Holy Courage in the tributes. And such energy too! For most of us, retirement means the prospect of putting our feet up and relaxing. But not for Deane and Dot. After a distinguished teaching career, culminating with 15 years as headmaster here, relaxing was the last thing on their mind! In full maturity, their response to God was the same as that of the young prophet Isaiah, ‘Here am I, Lord! Send me!’

It is a reminder to all of us that we are never too young nor too old to become a precious instrument in the hand of the Lord, to be used for his good purposes. Perhaps some of you here today are facing a cross-roads in your life, and wondering what turn your lives should take next. Well, the example of Deane and Dot is to put yourself into the hands of the living God, and let him guide you. And their advice would be to remember the words of St Paul: ‘If God is for you, who can be against you?’

Of course, this is no guarantee that life will be easy. There were many challenges in moving to Botswana and setting up Maru a Pula. We have heard how, in order to get the school built on time, Deane and Dot had to live in a tent on site. There was even the prospect of failure, when at first so few pupils enrolled. But they were not daunted. They did not give up. They knew that, whatever it was to which God called them, he was the one who would see it through, and who would make their efforts count in the eternal balance. For even when we

appear to fail in the eyes of the world, God takes our faithful obedience and uses it as a solid stone in building his kingdom, in ways that earthly eyes cannot always see. And Deane's heroic determination paid off – Maru a Pula became a success. It was a living testimony to another verse from St Paul, by which we should be encouraged when the challenges before us seem great: 'I can do all things in him who strengthens me' (Phil 4:13).

In remembering Deane and Dot, it is not just what they did, but how they did it, and why they did it, that sticks with me. We remember Dot's individual care for boys who battled, at St Johns – some with learning or hearing problems; or for lonely staff for overseas. We remember her support for the Community of the Resurrection, and her Wednesdays distributing peanut butter sandwiches in Alexandra. And, I need to add, my wife Lungi – here today – still claims that she has yet to meet the equal of Dot's pecan pie.

We remember Deane for his great selflessness; for the way he was so appreciative of everyone, and everything. We remember him as such a clear communicator. We remember him not only as a mentor, but someone with a gift of radical hospitality. For example, after retiring from Maru a Pula, he and Dot lived in his successor David Matthews' house in Houghton. It was a time of great tensions in the townships, and they made that home a refuge, where young men like me could go and stay, and read banned or censored material, and talk with others, in ways that were otherwise not open to us. It was a real sanctuary – a safe place, a place where God was honoured and his spirit dwelt.

For God is always with us, and for us, and working through us for others, above all so that we might truly come to know his love; and grow in experiencing that love and in sharing it with others. It was the love of God that motivated Deane and Dot. For Deane knew, as all the best teachers know, that education is about far, far more than filling heads with knowledge. Real education – the sort that helps produce maturing individuals, who can engage with the world with true wisdom, and become part of life's solutions, societies' solutions – this real education is of the whole human person. It is about our hearts, and about our innermost beings – it is about those parts of us which the love of God touches most profoundly.

We see how Deane understood this, in the way he set up Maru a Pula, and, even more clearly, in his formation of the New Era Schools Trust. For his desire was to transform our nation, through transforming young people – by letting them encounter one another as equals, on neutral ground. By creating new schools, where none had been before, in places that provided equal access to all pupils from all backgrounds. His dream was for everyone to find this new way of relating to one another – his desire that no child of Southern Africa should be, to echo the words of our gospel reading, 'lost' to the destructive system of the past. It was as though he was in a small way creating a space that could be a model for the new South Africa – which, at that point, still remained just a dream. Yet he knew it was a dream worth working to create. As he said then 'It is only by growing up together in their formative years that the boys and girls of the emerging South Africa will remove apartheid from their hearts.'

I thank God that Deane and Dot lived to see the dawn of the New South Africa. Yet the task of removing the malign influence of apartheid remains a challenge. It is our hearts, our innermost beings, that must be touched, that must be changed. And working with the new generations of girls and boys is the most urgent and necessary part of that task – for we cannot afford to let the impact of apartheid continue to fester within our societies.

The challenge is vast and daunting – but we too should not allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by it. We must not let fear take us over. Instead we should hear the words of God that Deane recalls for us today: ‘If God is for us, who is against us?’ And God will help us, as he helped Deane, to work for to provide quality education for all, especially those who are the inheritors of historic exclusion, and those who are excluded by the circumstances of today.

So today we say thank you – to Deane, for all he was (and especially for all he was, with Dot by his side). We give thanks to God for all that he enabled Deane to do and to be. And we give thanks that Deane, with Dot, has now gone to that place of rest and peace and joy which is for all God’s faithful ones.

We comfort ourselves, in the face of the mystery – the daunting, fearful mystery – of death, with those words Deane chose for our service today: ‘In all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angles, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.’

Nothing in life, nothing in death, can separate us from God’s love. It is the same message as the words of Jesus, from our Gospel: that all who believe in him will have eternal life; and he will raise them up, he will raise us up, on the last day. And so, with great confidence, in this Mass we commend Deane into the eternal arms of our loving God, believing that he will be raised up on the last day: and hear those words of his beloved Lord saying ‘Well done, good and faithful servant ... enter now into the joy of your master.’ May it indeed be so.

Rest eternal grant to him, O Lord – and let light perpetual shine upon him. May he rest in peace – and rise in glory. Amen