

Archbishop Thabo Makgoba

Eucharist with the Society of the Sacred Mission

18 January 2012

(Rough transcript, not for further distribution!)

The Confession of St Peter: Ezek 3:4-11; Ps 23; Acts 4:8-13; Mt 16:13-19

I welcome you to Bishops court and thank the Provincial for working to ensure that you have time with me. I'm longing like Paul to meet you as a society together. Fr Michael Lapsley can tell you how difficult it is to get a slot in my diary. Sometimes I find difficult myself, to fit in time at the gym, golf or holiday for myself!

Let me begin with something of a digression, though it is an important digression for me. I grew up in Alexandra Township, when the Fathers of the Community of the Resurrection were very active in Sophiatown and Alexandra. I attended St Michael's Anglican Primary school (which the deputy President of South Africa, Kgalema Motlanthe, also attended). I was there when the schools were taken by the government and was part of the Bantu education, and St Michael's was then called Polusho Salvation, and we called it Liberation, which was quite a political statement 'Salvation Liberation' those days. Just to take out any traces of Anglicanism, the government of the day of apartheid would send a Dutch Reformed domine to do Assembly as opposed to the chaplain doing the Eucharist every day.

This Dutch reformed priest died last year and I attended his funeral, Sam Bhuti, who was known as a moderator[?] for a very long time. He preached on one text for probably seven years of my time there: about the value of dry bones, and so I thought the Bible must be about the value of the dry bones from Genesis to Revelation, because Sam Bhuti never spoke about anything else but, about the value of dry bones! He was a dramatic preacher and as a young person I walked the streets of Alex, terrified thinking that I will one day step into this valley and meet these bones; or one day, see these people that Sam Bhuti was talking about having gained their muscles and sinews, now walking in Alex, the township. For us, ghosts were a reality, so we scared of ghosts. So I never got to understand his message and the Bible properly because his message was terrifying, and the last thing I wanted to see in Alexandra was the ghost of a dead gangster coming back to terrorise us.

That's my context and that context has shaped my love for scripture, but has also made me aware that if scripture is used badly, it could have unintended consequences. But it also started me to have a relationship with my community and a relationship with my God. It's not that clear. The Alexander community is a rather small community, a very poor community and at the moment the government is trying to improve Alexandra Township but the community is still very poor.

Two things I've taken from that journey there are first, the importance of community, the importance of communal living, and, second, the importance of self-care and self-management. In the context of gangsterism, there is a question of 'I don't want to have ethics or morality that says: "as long as I'm not caught, I'm ok!";' but it was something that was informed by the value that whatever I decided and whatever I believed in as a youngster, I could live it in the dark, live it in the open, and live it in church and everywhere. Because in Alexandra, if, e.g., you told a lie about a community member to one member and

that lie came out, in Alex, there was 'mob-justice'- meaning you paid with your life and sometimes you'll see dead people in the streets. The police wouldn't care. The police would only fetch and cover the dead with blankets after about eight hours. When asked what happened, they'd say: 'that man thought he won't be caught. He said this thing about this person to that person,' and in Alex that was bad.

So from an early age I knew that – even if I didn't have the terminology I have now to describe it – that my morality cannot be selective; i.e. my personal morality. My engagement with my community cannot be selective. If I say this, I must do this; if I say that, I must do that.

As I address you today, I address you in the context of what Thabo Mbeki said recently: we need to check the use and power of knowledge and he gave examples of how Western society created false knowledge in order to kill Saddam Hussein. They said there were weapons of mass destruction, and they never found them. But because they had splashed that information, it led to the death of Saddam Hussein; and his religion and beliefs were ignored and he was buried at sea against the Muslim practice. *[Note: there appears to be confusion here between Saddam Hussein and WMDs; and Osama bin Laden, who was killed and buried at sea.]* Thabo Mbeki gave a further example saying: The West, whether it comes from Lockerbie when Libya did those atrocities, or whether it has anything to do with American elections, but the western powers were determined. They wanted a regime change in Libya and they created a no-fly-zone without the proper protocols in the United Nations and indeed, Moammar Gaddafi was killed. In South Africa, the Broadcasting Complaints Commission is taking some of TV stations to task and they may be fined because they apparently transgressed the rules by showing gory pictures of Moammar Gaddafi begging for his life and being killed. It is believed that that is a transgression of the broadcasting laws in South Africa. But Thabo [Mbeki] is saying knowledge is spread that they wanted to kill Moammar Gaddafi and M.G was killed. But if you researched, you would find that that is a lie because the West was determined to do a regime change.

I address you in that global context where e.g. the Arabs are praying. I address you when the ANC in South Africa had just celebrated 100 years, a wonderful party, a wonderful occasion. But if you look at the fact that Free State for the last 3 years ran out of money for ARVs, then you wonder if the money spent by the ANC on the 100 year celebration is justifiable.

I also address you in a context now where I think the Prime Minister of Lesotho may want a 4th term. Those who come from Lesotho know that around Leabua Jonathan's time, when the Basotho's hacked each other and the people used to vanish, there were lots of fights and people were thrown down a hill. We hope that seeking a 4th term will not create any conflict or any strife. When politicians fight, they want to use the priests, the archbishops, the simple people to demonstrate that 'we mean it when we say that we kill'. So you can imagine – and I am 'being wild here' – the politician saying 'Go and get a brother from SSM and let's shoot him to show how daring and cruel we are and we mean it.' When you get a man of God or a woman of God your do send panic into the context.

I am addressing you having only arrived last night. I was in Swaziland since Thursday. For lack of a better term, I went to confirm that I have 'fired' the Bishop of Swaziland. I just use those terms because there was an issue of bad administration and an issue of poor judgement in terms of morality and I've taken a year to look at that. The Diocesan [Diocese] was in severe tensions. So I went, and confirmed that, and I've asked 2 retired bishops to look after the Diocese of Swaziland.

So it's not morality of bad people out there that I'm talking about, that's why I'm showing you this example: it's the people within the Church of God. The last example of within, I have to ask again, that I'm using strong language to understand [where I'm coming from] my point of reference. I had to fire the Bishop of George because he had been a very bad person in terms of judgement on money issues. He may not have stolen the money, but as a bishop, millions and millions were lost [that were his responsibility]. And so we are like the Old Testament passage we read today. We are given 'hard' skin for ourselves, for us to be stubborn, but as in the New Testament, that was read today, we may reflect the Glory of God. If I may use that theology, 'we have been purchased with a dear price and not for our own good, but for the honour and glory of God' and like Peter, our confession should be, when we see Christ in those who are HIV +, Christ in those who are poor, Christ in those that are down-trodden, to reflect that he is the Messiah, but not only in our words and action, but in our thoughts and in how we live out as the community.

The world is battling and we are seeking for communities that say, 'it is possible to live with integrity, it is possible to live with honesty, it is possible to live with truthfulness. So the world is yearning for that morality not the morality of 'ducking-out' [*ie avoidance*].

When we are school boys, we say: 'Where is the principal? And I don't know why, but the principal wore old shoes that made a noise. So the principal would be sneaking in, but we knew the principal would be coming in from that side, and so we would turn this side and smoke. The principal kept quiet but he knew his victims. He would say: 'You! You were smoking!' and you would say: 'No, no!' He would not argue but cane you. For years we'd say: 'How does this man know?' But we were young and foolish, and, of course, cigarettes smell!

This example can be taken into other areas of our lives. We try to hide our behaviour: the way you talk, the way you pray, the rhythm of your spiritualities. But just as when you have been smoking and the principal knows, so as brothers, your morality shows. Yours cannot be the morality of 'ducking-out' [*avoidance*]. You have to inculcate a sense of 'God in you, God within you, and God about you', type of morality.

The other way [?] you have committed yourselves into a wonderful, wonderful community and the SSM are respected. You have made mistakes through the years, but on the whole, they've being a wonderful community. They've left a wonderful legacy. You have an enormous challenge to ensure that you too leave a legacy that reflects God; and if you don't, the church history and society will judge you harshly because we look after [?ie to] you. So let us continue holding that sense of possibility to a world that is dying.

I do not want to be an alarmist. Those who worked with me know that when I was a youngster at university before I responded to the vocation, most of my friends and family members went to join Umkhonto we Sizwe; and we remained back in Alex and Soweto working in the underground structures of the ANC, ensuring the message was like a gospel message, freedom, truthfulness, common good and dignity. [*Rest of this para is unclear ...*] So as the youth members in the church lets ensure we bring those things. One thing we also learnt in that time, not to be an alarmist; not to be a principal or a priest. I had a difference with Fr Michael. Instead of saying Fr Michael let's sit down and let me tell [about the issues not sitting well with me] and leave Fr Michael and wait [for an audience] to then 'spill the beans' agitating everyone and all feeling guilty and terrified if I will ever be good enough. So I've spoiled the balance because I should only have spoken to that one person. I am not that type of person.

But as your Visitor, I talk from time to time to Fr Michael, and even though I sometimes downplay my sense of calm, I am a bit alarmed by some of the moral issues that are starting to shape out of us. I talk as a member of the community as a visitor and I'm not naming [?names], but if sexuality is not placed in the right context as a gift from God, and if we don't deal with that aspect of ourselves as those that are taking vows not to engage sexual intimacy, we need to name it if it becomes a great burden in our witness. Like Paul used to say: 'If it is a problem for you, marry.' I want to be upfront [direct] with you and very clear. If the issue of sex is a challenge and a problem, don't lie to you, don't lie to the community, and don't lie yourself and don't lie to God. Deal with it or acknowledge that maybe I'm not called into this community, rather than hide for the sake, let's say, I do need the Peculium [?], I do need to be housed, I need to be educated, I need a place where I feel safe.

But the reality is that you are not only using the Society, but you also using God. That is one area – not to over-label it, but I'm saying as you begin the year and as you meet together and as a visitor I can [*verb unclear*] this, and say: If you're not scrupulously honest with your emerging sense of right and wrong, particularly in the area of sex, then you are hurting yourself and you're hurting the Society. You are hurting the community, but you're in an Anglican Order and the Archbishop is your visitor. It impacts on me personally but also it impacts on this Office [of Archbishop, at Bishops court]. I'm not saying it in order to protect the Archbishop, and say: 'I could be doing this at night, but the Archbishop said: "I must not do it".' I'm saying: inculcate a sense of honesty, a sense of loyalty, and a sense of integrity.

The second issue is how I knew that bishop Mabuza was in trouble. It was because he started becoming a joke in Swaziland and these things do travel here. We bothering as a community in Lesotho to declining a bit into becoming a joke and the onus is on us to be taking seriously. I could ignore these things, and want to appear as a very nice person in front of you, but I care deeply about SSM, I care deeply about Religious Orders in South Africa.

I've being sharing with Fr Michael that I feel impoverished that the Anglican Diocese of Cape Town does not have a single religious House. It is an impoverishment. I read my first English text at the CR Fathers' House. What I'm talking about is something very deep in me; it comes out of a need that you should succeed. Though we don't talk about success in the Bible or in the church, you should be faithful in the things of God, so that others may be drawn by the quality of your life, of your mind and actions; rather than the peculium or by sheltered existence and by our own ambitions of wanting to be a priest one day and seeing this as a conduit for your own end, then ending up as a priest, but don't feel 'called' and it ends up as a double-standard.

I don't want to appear as if I'm saying 'intimacy is wrong.' Intimacy is not wrong. But in your context, intimacy can be shown differently. You could be companions to each other. You could support one another. You could go an extra mile to say: 'Br 'X' is not well', even if he's bubbly, jumping up and down, because I pray for him daily in my prayer today, I was absent-minded. That's an indication that, if every day you focus on a particular issue, but for this week 'the well runs dry', it may be an indication that things are not well. So, this how you can show intimacy, in prayer, in supporting one another, in praying for one another together, in reading together, in challenging one another to grow spiritually, emotionally, mentally and otherwise. Perhaps in your formation groups, you could create

an opportunity. Even if it's not just for your formation group, meet once a month and call it the session 'How are you'.

At Synod of Bishops, I've re-introduced a session called 'Just sharing'. Bishops that are agenda-driven started becoming very frustrated, they said: 'where are we on the Agenda, Archbishop? Where are we?' I've just finished 4 years as Archbishop, I'm entering my 5th year, and I'll tell you one of the best sessions is 'Just sharing'. For the 1st time I'm taken this in February to Modderpoort, for the whole Synod of Bishops is just sharing with the agenda aside somewhere. We are trying to get input from the *Jesuits* to help us to just share. It is when we know each other at a deep spiritual level that we are able to care for each other intimately and deeply; and when the problems of having to ask one of us to lay down 'his stuff' comes, it doesn't become difficult.

I wanted to share with you those three things. I know it sounded like a lecture, those 3 things [issues] are: let's inculcate a morality which is rooted in Christ Jesus that reflects in what we do and say, we are saying like Peter we confessing the Messiah, the anointed one. And related to that is: let's look at something which in a community like this can easily undermine our witness, the whole issue of sex and sexuality. Let's look at the journey we're being in terms of the downfall of this particular Society, in that area of sex and sexuality, and use it as a stepping stone, never again to fall back, and if as Paul says if you have a problem: don't stay for the sake of peculium, don't stay for the sake of being housed. Be honest and say: 'No, I have a problem', or stay and say 'I have a problem, Society help me!' rather than try and duck and dive.

Lastly, on the earlier mention of caring for one another, you may need to introduce what I call 'Just Sharing' opportunity for the brothers, to reflect on their journey where they are and where they going.

So that's my input as I welcome you to Bishopscourt.

Thank You!