

# **Archbishop Thabo Makgoba**

## **Holy Cross School Blessing – Grahamstown**

### **4 February 2012**

---

Manche Masemola of Sekhukhuneland, Virgin and Martyr, 1928  
Euch: 1 Pet 4:12-19; Ps 3; Mt 25:1-13

‘If any of you suffers as a Christian, do not consider it a disgrace, but glorify God because you bear this name’ – 1 Pet 4:16.

Manche Masemola, a young woman of the Pedi tribe, passed her short life in Sekhukhuneland, in the Transvaal. Her people were confined to reserved lands that were barren, and worked hard to eke out a living there. For some decades German and then English missionaries had settled in the Transvaal, and in the early twentieth century there existed a Pedi Christian minority, widely viewed with anxiety and suspicion by others of the tribe who remained true to the faith of their predecessors.

It is believed that Manche Masemola was born around 1913, in Marishane. She grew up with her parents, two older brothers, a younger sister, Mabule, and a cousin, Lucia. She did not go to school, but worked with her family on the land and at home.

In 1919 Fr Augustine Moeka of the Anglican Community of the Resurrection had established a mission at Marishane, where the chief was content to see missionaries of all churches live and work. It was with her cousin Lucia that Manche Masemola first heard Moeka preach. She wished to hear more, and began to attend classes twice a week.

Fearful that she would leave them, or refuse to marry, her parents sought to discourage her. But she defied them. When their prohibitions failed she was beaten. On a number of occasions Manche Masemola remarked to Lucia and Moeka that she would die at their hands. Then, on or near 4 February 1928, her mother and father took her away to a lonely place and killed her. She was buried by a granite rock on a remote hillside. A few days later her younger sister, Mabule, became ill and then died at the nearby mission hospital, the Jane Furse. Mabula was buried beside her sister. In remembrance, their father planted euphorbia trees beside their graves.

In 1935 a little group of Christians made a pilgrimage to the grave. Another followed in 1941; a third in 1949. In 1969 her mother was baptized. In 1975 the name of Manche Masemola was added to the CPSA (ACSA) calendar of saints. Now, hundreds visit the site every August.

Her statue is one of 10 Martyrs of the 20th Century, above the West Entrance to Westminster Abbey. This indicates how great and widespread an influence (surely unimaginable to Manche) an ‘insignificant’ child can have in God’s kingdom – just by being faithful in loving Jesus.