

Archbishop Thabo Makgoba
Sermon and Blessing at a Service of Thanksgiving
for the Diamond Jubilee of HM Queen Elizabeth II
in the presence of HRH The Princess Royal
Pretoria Cathedral
17 April 2012

1 Timothy 2:1-6

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings should be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself a ransom for all – this was attested at the right time.

May I speak in the name of God, who desires for us a quiet and peaceable life, lived in all godliness and dignity.

Your Royal Highness, Vice-Admiral Laurence, Excellencies, honoured guests, Cathedral Chapter and Choir, Choirs of Pretoria Girls' and Pretoria Boys' High Schools, brothers and sisters in Christ, friends – it is a great privilege to reflect on today's joyful celebrations of the Her Majesty's Diamond Jubilee, not only as Queen of England, but also as head of the Commonwealth.

When South Africa finally achieved democracy in 1994, re-joining the Commonwealth was one of our new government's first priorities.

The old South Africa was, of course, among its founders. Indeed, the Afrikaner statesman, Jan Smuts, was among the first to propose such a network of nations, with historic ties to the British Crown.

Yet some asked in 1994 – and some continue to ask – why, after our long struggle for freedom, we should want to link ourselves to this body, with – let us be honest – roots in both colonialism and our own traumatic past.

But today's South Africans, more than most people, know that none of us need remain victims of our past.

And at Eastertide, most of all, we affirm that no situation is beyond redemptive transformation, new life, and fruitful growth.

Today's Commonwealth is vastly different from that envisaged by its founders.

Its modern identity – reflected in the Singapore Declaration of 1971 – is a voluntary association of nations who believe that 'international peace and order are essential to the security and prosperity of mankind'.

It is committed to individual liberty, human rights and good governance, upheld by the rule of law within effectively functioning democracies.

All this, of course, lies at the heart of the new South African Constitution.

It also lies at the heart of God's desires for human society – as you read for us, Your Royal Highness.

This is the 'quiet and peaceable life', lived 'in all godliness and dignity', so we might come to 'knowledge of the truth'.

Knowing God's truth relates not only to our eternal destiny, but is also found in tangibly experiencing the liberty and abundant life promised by Christ Jesus – 'the one mediator between God and humanity' – in every area of human existence.

This good news, Christ's gospel, should touch our souls, certainly; but also our hearts, minds and physical well-being, here and now: as individuals, and in our societies, nations and political systems.

As I see it, this ranges from the abolition of material poverty, through to the freedom of speech of individuals and media.

It also entails the provision of neutral secular space in which all faiths and none may be freely followed; as everyone enjoys tangible opportunity and encouragement to aspire to the greatest good of all.

When we live like this, says St Paul, 'it is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour.'

Therefore all in authority should expect citizens to hold them to such ideals, even as we also undertake to pray for God's help – that leaders might have wisdom to know the right path to pursue, and the strength and courage to follow it.

In this, we also look to God, in Jesus Christ, for a true understanding of right leadership.

As Holy Week and Easter remind us, it is the leadership of service, the readiness to dedicate his whole life to the responsibilities entrusted to him.

We pray that the good example of the Queen – whose life has been so marked by these characteristics, and who says so clearly that she tries to follow Christ's example – ... we pray that her example may be emulated throughout the Commonwealth and beyond: in servant leadership, dedicated to the well-being of nations and peoples, especially those in greatest need.

The Commonwealth is a remarkable body, not least in the diversity of its members. This is both challenge and strength.

I am reminded of the Scriptural image of the Body of Christ. St Paul writes of the great diversity – even at times, mutual incomprehension – that there is between seeing eyes and hearing ears, between hands and feet.

But all hold together in Christ. Enriched by one another's presence, they are able to do far more together than they could apart.

[This is something that a similar international association, the Anglican Communion, would do well to remember!]

It is [also] our hope for the Commonwealth, united through the largely gospel-shaped principles outlined in the Singapore Declaration.

We look especially to Britain, to be a servant leader within, and beyond, the Commonwealth – helping us all breathe vibrant life into the principles we share, and further peace with justice throughout the world.

Yet South Africa, alongside other members, must also make our contribution to the Commonwealth's work – of which education is one priority area, very close to my heart.

Another is the Environment. It is perhaps a happy coincidence that the main Diamond Jubilee celebrations fall on World Environment Day – both point us to faithful stewardship of whatever responsibilities are entrusted to us.

Today we celebrate a long life of faithful stewardship.

Indeed, it was more than sixty years ago, when, in 1947, the young Princess Elizabeth first addressed the Commonwealth.

And it was here in South Africa – in Cape Town to be exact – where she spoke these famous words:

'I declare before you all that my whole life, whether it be long or short, shall be devoted to your service.'

And so, with great joy in our hearts, we thank the 'God of Grace' of whom we earlier sang, for his 'glorious faithfulness', and for hers; that

as Queen, she has been enabled to fulfil her promise, to such a great degree

We offer her our heartfelt congratulations, and our prayers: both our prayers of thanksgiving for this life of dedicated service; and our intercessions that she may continue to walk in the blessed ways of the Lord in all that still lies ahead.

And may, as we also sang, our Great Redeemer continue to guide each one of us, and may we all, throughout our lives, ever give him our songs and our praises.

Amen.

The Blessing

God the Father,
for the coming of whose kingdom we pray,
grant his wisdom and guidance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second,
and to all in authority;

God the Son,
who is the Prince of Peace,
grant all people a quiet and peaceable life,
of godliness and dignity;

God the Holy Spirit,
who strengthens our inner being by his power,
grant us the surpassing knowledge of his truth,
and the immeasurable fullness of his love;

Go forth into the world in peace, be of good courage,
fight the good fight of faith, that you may finish your course with joy;
and the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among you, and remain with you always. Amen