

**OPENING OF SYNOD OF THE ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF CAPE TOWN: ST CYPRIAN'S CHURCH.
14 August 2014**

"God's Holiness at work in the everyday lives of the saints for the living of these days. What is the Church and the vocation of the Church in these days"

Message and Greeting from Stephen Brislin, Catholic Archbishop of Cape Town

Thank you for the invitation to be with you this evening – I feel honoured that you have asked me to be present at the opening of your Synod. I wish to take this opportunity of wishing you God's blessing on what you are doing, and I pray that He will give you every grace and the fullness of His Holy Spirit that you may discern His will, and have the courage to implement what you discern.

Discernment of God's will is an ongoing process and cannot be accomplished without reminding ourselves that we must be rooted in Jesus Christ. Christ is our foundation, He is the source of life, He is the Word which has the power to transform, to make things in the image that He desires us to be. We must preach Christ and not ourselves or our own particular agendas. To preach Christ and to subject ourselves to His will takes much prayer, openness and seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We cannot discern the Will of God without humbling ourselves and acknowledging – and reminding ourselves – that we are merely the created and He is the Creator, whose thoughts are not our thoughts and whose ways are not our ways.

How do we proclaim Christ today, in a world that appears too apathetic in terms of things Religious and, at times, even hostile to faith? From its inception, the church has always faced a daunting task, one that seemed impossible, at least humanly speaking. The small and fragile group of first believers faced hostility, ostracization and persecution. In many ways, the blood of the martyrs became the seedbed of our faith, which eventually led to it flourishing, and reaching every corner of the world. Christianity has brought about profound change among people and about how we view ourselves and how we relate to each other. Such change has affected all over those who may fundamentally reject the idea of God as a Superior Being.

So we should not take fright at the challenges, which face us today. Nor should we give in to any despair or despondency. Rather, we are called to be bold and to remain faithful to the mission of the Church to proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. The Church is by her very nature missionary. If we are no longer missionary we are no longer Church. We have adapted to an understanding of missionary as those who left family and country to go and preach the Gospel to "the heathen", those who had never heard of the Gospel.

Today we understand our missionary nature more broadly. Certainly, Christ must still be preached to those who do not know him. But to be missionary is also to continue to nurture and care for the needs of those who do believe and to strengthen and accompany them on their pilgrim journey. But the really great challenge today is to proclaim Christ to those who do know him, but who have become apathetic, or who have fallen away from the faith, or who have – for some reason or another, perhaps because of scandal – rejected him.

Today we need to evangelize, to proclaim Christ using new methods and framing the proclamation in a language and with concepts that are understandable to the modern person. We become attached to our traditions, and it is not necessarily bad that that be so. But we must

also and continually re-assess our traditions to evaluate them as to whether they continue to serve the needs of the mission of the Church with its ultimate aim of bringing people to an encounter with Jesus Christ. It is Christ who transforms people, not us, and faith is about a relationship with Christ as Saviour of all, and not about a philosophy of life or an intellectual assent to a set of beliefs.

And so we should not be ashamed of the mission we have “to go to all nations and to baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”. Especially in this secularised world we need to bring Christ to the public square. We may fear that secularism is hostile to Religion and Christianity, but ironically it is precisely a secularist outlook that gives us the opportunity to make Christ public. We should not confuse our task of evangelization with that of proselytization. To bring Christ to the public square, to enable people to encounter Christ, is to allow him to transform them without any narrow denominational type self-interest. This is truly a matter of faith – to allow Christ to change the hearts of people and nations without thinking that it can only be done in our own narrow way. It is to allow people to see as God sees, to hear as God hears.

It is about teaching what Christ taught, the kernel of which is the primacy of love with its constituent elements of mercy, forgiveness, reconciliation, peace, justice, unity, solidarity with the poor and afflicted, sacrifice and service to others. The teaching can only be accomplished by living those teachings and by giving witness to what we believe; we do that in the way in which we live our lives. The missionary task to evangelize belongs to all the baptised, not only a certain group. We should never under-estimate the true holiness of a believer who may not be widely known or have publicity or fame, but who lives his or her life sincerely, humbly and obediently, learning from the Divine Master to love tenderly, to forgive generously and to serve graciously. Such people are the building-blocks of true community that seeks to be a genuinely caring community, hospitable and open. It is a community that does not look inwards, but turns outwards and strives to place itself at the service of humanity. Such a community is itself a powerful witness to Christian living in the face of individualism and perceived self-sufficiency with its consequent loneliness and isolation.

To be at the service of humanity goes far further than simple charity in the sense of the “haves” giving to the “have-nots”. Service to the community means being in solidarity with those who suffer from poverty or injustice, who do not have access to opportunities, to health care, education, decent housing, clean water, sewerage and the like. True solidarity means that we will work for change and Pope Francis has reminded us in *Evangelii Gaudium* that the social dimension of the Gospel is as necessary for evangelization as any other aspect – provided it remains founded on our faith. This is a pressing and urgent action that we, as people of faith, must embrace – sometimes it is called the prophetic voice of the Church. But Pope Francis is quick to remind us, rightly, that it cannot stop with talking – we need to work for that change. In many ways, that is a frightening task and humanly impossible – much as it was for the early Church. But it is a task that must be undertaken as we witness to love of God and love of neighbour. There are those, perhaps through frustration, despair or hatred, who take short cuts and resort to violence. Our world is engulfed in violence – Iraq, the Holy Land, Syria, Congo, South Sudan and many other places. In our own country we witness violence each day when service delivery protests turn violent, when women are raped, in violence against women and children, murder, the horror of Marikana and so on. We should not forget that poverty itself is a form of violence.

I believe that an urgent task of our Christian living and of our task to evangelize – in expressing the commandment of love – is to seek the things that make for peace. In the 60s and 70s there was an animated response against nuclear weapons and the futility of war. Even if it was flawed in some ways, we need to revive that spirit of seeking peace, of ways of reconciling – based on justice – to help people beat their swords into ploughshares.

Working for peace is an imperative of Christianity and it is an urgent task that we have as Christians to offer that peace to a world, that despite its materialism, its secular nature, its bravado and arrogance, is truly thirsting for that which is authentic and true, for that which can bring peace, harmony and well-being. Humanely impossible, but with the grace of God certainly possible, and that is the reason for our hope, a hope we have to offer those desperately in need of it.

+ Stephen Brislin
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