

**MINISTRY FOR MISSION
LANSDOWNE
28th JANUARY 2023**

It is a great pleasure for me to be with you this morning, and many thanks to Fr Zane for inviting me to give this address. Thank you, also, Fr Zane and the team for organising this day when we reflect on Ministry for Mission.

Jesus came to serve and not to be served (Matt 20:28). We are all very familiar with those words, and we understand that we are meant to do as he, our Master, has done. His service was not merely service, though – it was *humble* service. So, for example, he knelt at the feet of his apostles at the Last Supper and washed their feet, a ritual that would ordinarily have been assigned to a servant or slave to do. It was at the Last Supper that he gave us the injunction to do likewise. Let's hear once again those words of Scripture:

“When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.” (John 13:12-17).

The mark of Christianity and the life of discipleship is precisely to put oneself at the service of others, and not in a way in which we “lord it over” others, but humbly and generously. This is our baptismal calling and is not confined to certain people or certain groups of people among the baptized. For this reason Christians do not have a false separation between their ordinary, daily life and their spiritual life. For example, Christians would understand that whatever their work or job is, that being a parent or husband/wife, whatever association we belong to, we fulfil our obligations not merely as an obligation, but as a way of serving others and contributing to the community. As St Paul said, and there are three key ideas in this reading which I will return to later:

“love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.” (Rom 12:10ff).

In this sense, every baptized person is meant to be a *minister* and to *minister* to the needs of others, because ministry means *service*.

It is important not to forget this foundational calling to serve which we have through our Baptism, because it puts into perspective what we generally refer to as ministry in the Church, that is those more specific roles that we have chosen, and have been chosen for. The foundation is important because there are three key concepts, which are evident in the Reading from St Paul, that must

guide and inform us in our specialized ministries. The first is **spirituality**. Thus, St Paul says: “do not lag in zeal”, “be ardent in spirit”, “serve the Lord”, “rejoice in hope”, “be patient in suffering”, “persevere in prayer” – all of these refer to a lived spirituality, a life that is oriented to God and having him as the focus of our lives. The second concept is that of **community**. Our actions are directed to the well-being of others and to strengthening the bonds of mutual goodwill between us as people. Thus he says, “contribute to the needs of the saints”, “outdo one another in showing honour” and “Love one another with mutual affection”. Having God as the focus of our lives does not and cannot mean that we neglect others and their needs. On the contrary, our focus on God is expressed through making strong the bonds between humankind. The third concept is, **going beyond community**. St Paul says “show hospitality to strangers”. Our outreach, our kindness, generosity and love extends beyond the “us” to the “them”. Our lives are not to be of service only to our own “group” but must be inclusive and open to the “other”. This is really the mission that was given to Israel – to be the light to the nations (Is 42:6). Thus we, too, are described by Jesus as being the “light of the world” and told that our light is not to be hidden but is to be placed on a lamp stand for all to see (Matt 5:14-16). Thus, the previous Pastoral Plan of the SACBC had the theme “community serving humanity”.

These three concepts underlie the life of discipleship in general, but also form the foundation for ministry in the Church. Reflecting on them, we can also see that these three concepts are, in fact, the three legs of the three-legged pot of mission. Firstly, mission rests on a lively and active spiritual life – a life of prayer and oriented towards God. It is because we are in communion with the Triune God that we have the urge and the zeal to witness to his love and to teach others of it. Our spiritual life becomes the source of strength for us not to give up but to persevere, it is our driving force and it is the nourishment that feeds our own spirits, helping us to grow in authenticity, faithfulness and loyalty.

Secondly, to be missionary is not only to “go and tell others” about Christ – it is not merely the evangelising of those who have never heard of Christ, or who have rejected him. It is about evangelising in our own community. Faith is not static, it is dynamic, continually growing and deepening in knowledge but also in relationship with God. It is a life-long journey. To continue to grow in faith, we need to be fed and we are fed by God, who works through the ministers of his Church. Ministry become the instrument of evangelising those who already know and serve Christ by helping them to continually deepen their conversion in their quest to become more Christ-like. It is also true, that there are in our own community those who have grown weary, those who have been scandalized, and those who have just – for one reason or another – fallen away from the Church. To be missionary means to seek out the lost, the stray, and invite them to return to the fold, to become fully part of us again.

Thirdly, to be missionary means to reach out to those who are beyond our community of believers, and to proclaim Christ to them. We do this, not so much through words and teaching, but primarily through witness to what we believe about God. “Show the stranger hospitality”, says St Paul. This is a statement which encompasses many virtues – humility in accepting our common humanity which encompasses and embraces all people, openness to others, warmth, generosity, kindness, gentleness – all summed up by the word “love”. This is the crucial part of evangelization – it is Christ who converts people and it is the encounter with Christ that changes people’s hearts. We do not convert people, we do not save people. We have a Saviour, and that is Christ our Lord. We can only be the instruments through whom Christ can work. To be worthy instruments we have, first and foremost, to genuinely try and live what we believe and what our faith teaches. How many people in history have been turned away from the faith, who have been disillusioned, because of inauthentic Christians and because of those who have abused the teachings of Christ for their own purposes, such as justifying colonialism or apartheid.

Ministry, therefore, is intricately tied to mission and is part of this great endeavour of the Church, in fidelity to Christ’s command, to proclaim Christ as Lord and Saviour of mankind. Ministry, in itself, becomes a means to contribute to the mission of the Church and through ministry we can unite people to the person of Jesus Christ. When you think about it, this is an awesome task and an incredible privilege. Ministry can never be considered a “right”; rather it is an honour that is given to us to become more deeply involved in the proclamation of the Gospel and we should never take it lightly or complacently. Because it is so important, and because through ministry we in some way become the “face of the Church” there are some prerequisites for the effective accomplishment of ministry.

Firstly, we recognize that there are many different ministries in the Church. Often we think of ministry as been liturgical ministries, but there are others, such as teaching catechism. There are the ordained ministries – bishops, priests, deacons – and the ministries of the unordained. All are meant to work together, in harmony, each playing his/her part in order to make complete the service of God’s people which is offered by the Church. It is like a great tapestry of involvement in the life of the Church, where every stitch and every thread of colour is important and must be in its right place. To put it another way, ministry must be *ordered* in order to achieve its purpose, it cannot be “free for all” of people doing what they like or what comes to their mind. In a parish setting, it is part of the ministry of the parish priest to ensure two things: firstly, that people are given the opportunity to exercise ministry proper to them, and secondly that the ministries are ordered and organised. This harmony is in itself a way to draw people to God, who has given order to the universe from the very beginning.

The second prerequisite of appropriate ministry is appropriate motivation. For the ordained ministries, for example if I interview an applicant for the seminary, I will always try and determine what is the motivation of the applicant. Does he want status, is he attracted only to the peripheries of ministry such as vestments and the “bells and smells”, is he trying to escape from something, is he looking for what he perceives to be a comfortable lifestyle? Or is there a genuine, deeply felt calling to the priesthood, to serve God and to give compassionate pastoral care to God’s people? The motivation for unordained ministries may not be so rigorously questioned, but nonetheless we always need to keep motivation in mind, and it is a very worthy question for each person involved in ministry to reflect on their motivation and what is driving them to be involved in their particular ministry. If the motivation is wrong evangelization will be weakened.

The third prerequisite for missionary ministry is to know what our talents are and how we can use them in the service of the Church and for its mission. I may love to join the choir and be involved in music ministry, but my voice is useless and I can’t hold a note. I may love music, but it is not my talent and thus it is not the means that I must use to make my contribution. Gifts and talents differ and God works through those differences, but we need to know ourselves, our strengths and weaknesses. Where we have strengths we must use those to contribute to that great kaleidoscope, the tapestry, that I spoke about earlier.

Fourthly, no matter how good we may be at something, we always need to have training and to prepare well before the time. Any ministry in the Church requires some training, the “do’s” and the “don’t’s” of what we have been entrusted to do. For example, if you are a Reader – when do you approach the sanctuary, how do you stand, how to use the microphone, what to do with your hands, how to project your voice and so on. Secondly, ministry requires proper preparation every time before it is exercised. This applies to Readers, choir members, extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist, Parish Pastoral Council members etc. we do not go into an exercise of ministry “blind”. Furthermore, the training we need for ministry is *ongoing*. Sometimes we hear someone saying that they have been involved in teaching catechism for the past twenty years and they question why they should attend the annual training sessions – they have “been there and done that”. The very fact that they have been teaching catechism for so long and have stopped attending the training courses becomes a problem in itself, because they have probably got into a rut and are putting in very little thought or effort into what they are doing and how they could do it better. They have got into a routine. Furthermore, attending the training sessions means that we participate in the life and the spirit of those throughout the diocese who are involved in the same ministry, and so we are part of that evangelical and missionary thrust of the Church. Through participation we strengthen each other. I cannot emphasise enough the importance of participation.

Fifthly, being involved in a ministry requires that we give proper respect to other ministries. We have our role to play and we must play it as best we possibly can using all our ability. But we should never encroach on the ministry and the roles that others play. This applies to all ministry, including that of the priest. The priest, while having overall responsibility, is meant to enhance ministry and to open up opportunities for others to be involved, according to their ability and according to the needs of the parish – he should not be doing everything himself. Other ministers, too, should not be so involved in a multiplicity of ministries that eventually it is perceived as a “one man” or “one woman” show, which may discourage others and put them off from making themselves available. So, respect is key: we don’t encroach on the ministries of others and we allow others to have opportunities for ministry.

Sixthly, and of vital importance, ministry is not about “me”, it is not about the individual. In the exercise of any ministry we are proclaiming Christ and we wish to draw people, not to ourselves, but to Jesus Christ. He must be the focus and we need to be diligent in ensuring that this is always the case. There can be the temptation, especially in the liturgical ministries, to become a bit “showy” or even a bit of a “show off”, drawing attention to ourselves. If we do that, we have become counter-missionary, no longer leading people to Christ. In the words of St John the Baptist, *“He must increase, but I must decrease”* (Jn 3:30). So whatever ministry we are involved in, we do it respectfully, with humility and conscientiously, and with great care never to give scandal to anyone. When we scandalize people we are turning them away from God. In Psalm 68(69) we hear the words:

“Let not those who hope in you be put to shame through me, Lord of hosts: let not those who seek you be dismayed through me, God of Israel.”

We have an enormous responsibility not to cause offence in our ministries and certainly not to scandalize people. Again, this goes to the issue of respect for others. In this regard I would also like to mention the question of how we conduct ourselves and how we dress. There is no need to dress to “the nines” when you are ministering (in fact, please don’t), but be modest in the way you dress, simple but decent. We South Africans are very casual and down to earth people, and that is beautiful, but we shouldn’t overdo it either. We must remember that we are the “face of the Church” through ministry, and our conduct must be show that.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all of you who have accepted different ministries in the Church. You contribute to the life and well-being of the People of God and, through ministry and the witness of your life, you are integrally part of the mission of the Church and the evangelization of people. I appreciate your sacrifices, your commitment and your love for God and for his people. To be as effective as possible in ministry, I have mentioned those six points which I regard as prerequisites to effectively minister and of which we need to be conscious. Ministry not

only contributes to the life of the Church, but it should change us as well, as we grow in faith and deepen our love of God and neighbour. Ministry should humble us and make us better people, more conscious of God's presence and how privileged we are to be able to give our lives in service. Thank you.

Questions:

1. How can we enhance the understanding of mission among parishioners in our parishes?
2. What steps should we undertake to ensure that our commitment to mission through ministry does not wane or weaken?
3. How can we spiritually renew ourselves regularly to deepen and grow in the exercise of our ministries?