



Southern African Catholic
Bishops' Conference



SEEKING

**GOD'S MERCY &
THE COMMON GOOD**

Lenten Reflections

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Introductory Message

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In the previous years, we have issued various statements challenging political leaders to address the political and economic challenges in South Africa, Eswatini and Botswana.

We have not given up hope on the possibilities of change in the three respective countries because we know that the Holy Spirit is building something new in our lives, families and countries. “See, I am doing something new. Now it springs forth. Do you not perceive it?” (Isaiah 43:19).

We however believe that this new thing that God is building requires repentance and a greater sense of the common good, not only on the part of our political leaders, but also the ordinary citizens in the three countries.

While it is important for the Church to continue challenging our political leaders to prioritize the common good over their narrow political interests, we consider it important to remind ourselves that each one of us has a responsibility to work for the common good. God’s commandment to love our neighbor finds concrete expression in the way each of us places the good of the country ahead of our vested interests.

The FORMAT proposed is a simple one, as laid out on page 5. Last year, we asked all the parishes to recite a prayer for Southern Africa, a prayer asking God to heal our three countries. Each reflection therefore begins with this prayer. Our hope is that we all use the Lenten Season to fast and pray for the healing of the three respective countries.

The return to prayer should also be accompanied by repentance so that we embrace a way of life grounded on the love of God, love of neighbor and the common good. The reflections therefore include references to the Gospel and the Catholic Social Teaching. These should challenge us to repentance so that we become new people in Christ who put our lives at the service of God and the common good. Our prayer is that these reflections open our hearts to receive Christ and the power of His mercy in the Sacrament of Penance.

It is our hope and prayer that this Lenten season be a moment of God’s healing and repentance for us who are “created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared before hand to be our way of life.” (Ephesians 2:10)

Format of the Lenten Reflections

Opening Hymn (Lenten hymn)
Opening Prayer (as below)
Sharing of experiences
Being challenged by the Scriptures and Catholic Social Teaching
Deciding on a relevant action for the week for the group
Spontaneous prayers
Closing Prayer (as below).

Opening prayer (Prayer for Southern Africa)

Merciful Father, send forth your Spirit upon us the people of Southern Africa. May we hear anew the voice of Jesus Christ, inviting us to walk with him across the turbulent waters of our time: "Courage, it is I. Do not be afraid."

By the grace of the Holy Spirit empower us to bring comfort to the restless, hope to those who despair, healing to victims of violence and reconciliation where there is division.

May the Holy Spirit heal our families and communities. Grant us ethical and courageous leaders who put the good of the people before their own interest.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, we commit ourselves to speak the truth with courage, to act justly in all we do, to share with those in need, and always and everywhere to respect your gift of life as we strive to proclaim the values of the Kingdom in solidarity with all people of good will. Amen.

Closing prayer

God of love show us our place in this world as channels of your love for all the creatures of this earth, for not one of them is forgotten in your sight. Enlighten those who possess power and money that they may avoid the sin of indifference, that they may love the common good, advance the weak, and care for this world in which we live. Amen.

St. Francis of Assisi. Pray for us Blessed Benedict Daswa. Pray for us

Week 1- Problem of corruption

Opening hymn (Lenten hymn)

Opening prayer

Merciful Father, send forth your Spirit upon us the people of Southern Africa. May we hear anew the voice of Jesus Christ, inviting us to walk with him across the turbulent waters of our time: “Courage, it is I. Do not be afraid.”

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Brief Introduction

One of the problems we are facing in the three countries is the cancer of corruption.

The role of the government and politicians

How satisfied are you with the way the government is handling corruption? What more should the government do to end corruption?

Our role as ordinary citizens and as Christians

Is there a role that we as ordinary citizens and Christians can play to end the culture of bribery and corruption?

Sharing our personal experiences

What has been your personal experience of people demanding or receiving bribes? What has been your personal experience of people

doing less than what they are required at the workplace? What do you think is the root cause of these destructive practices?

How big is this problem in your community and workplace: employers demanding a bribe or sexual favours when one applies for a job or a job promotion? What are you as a Christian doing to address the problem?

Being challenged by the Gospel and the Catholic Social Teaching

“As we get enraged by corruption undertaken by politicians, it must be made clear that acting against it starts with you and me. At a personal level and in our workplaces, we must refuse to be part of corrupt activities.” (Bishop Sithembele Sipuka, Corruption has become South Africa’s other pandemic , Daily Dispatch, 3 September 2020). Ending the culture of bribery and corruption begins with you and me. How do these words challenge you as a Christian?

“Corruption manifests in different ways: use of time for which we are paid for “private gain” is corruption; arriving at the office to hang up your jacket and then leaving to do private businesses is corruption; even using a telephone provided for the purpose of our work to phone family members and friends is corruption?” (Bishop Sithembele Sipuka, Corruption has become South Africa’s other pandemic, Daily Dispatch, 3 September 2020). How do these words challenge you as a Christian?

Action

As an act of repentance, what can I (we) do this week in line with the above sharing?

Spontaneous prayers

Allow time for those who wish to make a petition in prayer on behalf of the group. Our Father ... Hail Mary ...

Closing prayer

God of love show us our place in this world as channels of your love for all the creatures of this earth, for not one of them is forgotten in your sight. Enlighten those who possess power and money that they may avoid the sin of indifference, that they may love the common good, advance the weak, and care for this world in which we live. Amen.

St. Francis of Assisi. Pray for us. Blessed Benedict Daswa. Pray for us

Week 2-The problem of unemployment

Opening hymn (Lenten hymn)

Opening prayer

Merciful Father, send forth your Spirit upon us the people of Southern Africa. May we hear anew the voice of Jesus Christ, inviting us to walk with him across the turbulent waters of our time: "Courage, it is I. Do not be afraid."

By the grace of the Holy Spirit empower us to bring comfort to the restless, hope to those who despair, healing to victims of violence and reconciliation where there is division.

May the Holy Spirit heal our families and communities. Grant us ethical and courageous leaders who put the good of the people before their own interest.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, we commit ourselves to speak the truth with courage, to act justly in all we do, to share with those in need, and always and everywhere to respect your gift of life as we strive to proclaim the values of the Kingdom in solidarity with all people of good will. Amen.

Brief Introduction

One of the problems we are facing in the three countries is the high levels of unemployment.

The role of the government and politicians

How satisfied are you with the way the government is handling unemployment? What more should the government do to end unemployment?

Our role as ordinary citizens and as Christians

Is there a role that we as ordinary citizens and Christians can play to address the problem of unemployment?

Sharing our personal experiences

Share an experience of a breadwinner losing a job or struggling to find a job. How have we reached out to the Lord for healing and hope in the midst of such experiences?

Share an experience of young people in your family struggling to find a job after finishing high school or college. When the government fails to create jobs, some pursue livelihoods through self-employment. What has been your experience of people trying to start small businesses and pursue self-employment?

Being challenged by the Gospel and the Catholic Social Teaching

In our Catholic tradition, work (either through self-employment or being employed by another) is more than just the way to earn a living. Work is one of the ways we participate in the ongoing work of God's creation in our world. "Created in the image of God, we are given the mandate to transform the earth. When we work, we share in God's work of creation. Through our work, we are unfolding the Creator's work and contributing to the realization of God's plan on earth" (Pope Saint John Paul II, On Human Work, 1981, #25) How does this notion of work challenge you?

Read Matthew 25:35-40. As my country faces economic crisis and unemployment crisis, what am I doing to help others who are less fortunate?

Action

As an act of repentance, what can I (we) do this week in line with the above sharing?

"Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28-30) As the country faces unemployment crisis, what is the healing that I and my family need to ask from the Lord? What is the healing that we need as a nation?

Spontaneous prayers

Allow time for those who wish to make a petition in prayer on behalf of the group. Our Father ... Hail Mary ...

Closing Prayer

God of love show us our place in this world as channels of your love for all the creatures of this earth, for not one of them is forgotten in your sight. Enlighten those who possess power and money that they may avoid the sin of indifference, that they may love the common good, advance the weak, and care for this world in which we live. Amen.

St. Francis of Assisi. Pray for us. Blessed Benedict Daswa. Pray for us

Week 3- Collapse of public services

Opening hymn (Lenten hymn)

Opening prayer

Merciful Father, send forth your Spirit upon us the people of Southern Africa. May we hear anew the voice of Jesus Christ, inviting us to walk with him across the turbulent waters of our time: “Courage, it is I. Do not be afraid.”

By the grace of the Holy Spirit empower us to bring comfort to the restless, hope to those who despair, healing to victims of violence and reconciliation where there is division.

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Brief Introduction

One of the problems we face as a nation is the collapse of public services. Sometimes, these are linked to corruption and mismanagement of municipalities and state owned enterprises. As a result, people are finding it difficult to access the services that are important for poverty eradication and economic recovery (electricity or energy, water services, sanitation services, lack of community recreational facilities for our youth, poor quality of education in public schools or colleges, potholes, broken infrastructure, failures in service delivery in public clinics and hospitals)

The role of the government

How satisfied are you with the way the government is handling the problems of service delivery and broken infrastructure? What more should the government do to address this problem?

Our role as ordinary citizens and as Christians

Is there a role that we as ordinary citizens can play to address the problem of failed municipalities and state owned enterprises?

“We remind all South Africans that each of us is responsible for building our country’s economy, including the municipalities and state owned enterprises.” (SACBC, Pastoral statement on the economy, 2022).

Sharing our personal experiences

How is the problem of electricity (load shedding) and water services affecting your life and that of your family? Share your personal experiences of failure in service delivery by municipalities: experiences of municipalities failing to provide community recreation facilities to the youth, street lights to ensure community protection at night, sewerage problems, water services, potholes, etc. Are we electing right people in our municipalities? Are we doing enough to hold them to account?

Being challenged by the Gospel and the Catholic Social Teaching “We have responsibility to work together as communities to stop the culture of cable theft, non-payment of municipal rates, vandalism and damage to infrastructure” (SACBC, pastoral statement on the economy, 2022). How does this message challenge you as a citizen and as a Christian?

What role do I play to challenge those involved in violent protests, vandalism and the destruction of infrastructure? What role do I play to end illegal dumping in my community?

As part of my ecological conversion, to what extent do I use electricity and water sparingly?

Action

As an act of repentance, what can I (we) do this week in line with the above sharing?

Spontaneous prayers

Allow time for those who wish to make a petition in prayer on behalf of the group. Our Father ... Hail Mary ...

Closing Prayer (Use the one on page 5)

Week 4- Protecting family as basic social unit

Opening hymn (Lenten hymn)

Opening prayer

Merciful Father, send forth your Spirit upon us the people of Southern Africa. May we hear anew the voice of Jesus Christ, inviting us to walk with him across the turbulent waters of our time: "Courage, it is I. Do not be afraid."

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Brief Introduction

There are many ways in which the political and economic crisis in the three countries negatively impacts the stability of family as a basic social unit.

Sharing our personal experiences

Some of the challenges that families face in the current economic and social crisis include: migration to cities to look for jobs, the rising cost of living with families struggling to make ends meet, families descending deeper into debts, stress and mental health problems, rising problem of abuse (emotional abuse, financial abuse, physical abuse), rising problem of absent fathers, lack of protection for the unborn.

Take one or two of these challenges and share your personal experiences. What is your personal experience of the absent fathers (children growing up without the presence and support of their fathers)?

What are you personally doing to address this social problem?

Being challenged by the Gospel and the Catholic Social Teaching

Take one or two of these quotes and share how they challenge you as a citizen and as a Christian.

In this time of economic difficulties, “families will always have their trials...but be living examples of love, forgiveness and care.” (Pope Francis, Meeting with families - Address of His Holiness Pope Francis, Mall of Asia Arena, Manila- 16 January 2015).

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, which helps couples to reflect on the ways in which love should show itself in midst of financial crisis as a family.

In this time of economic difficulties, “protect your families. See in them your country’s greatest treasure and nourish them always by prayer and the grace of the sacraments” (Pope Francis, Meeting with families - Address of His Holiness Pope Francis, Mall of Asia Arena, Manila, 16 January 2015). We often talk of bringing back prayer into schools? Should we also be talking of bringing back prayer into families?

“Become sanctuaries of respect for life, proclaiming the sacredness of every human life from conception to natural death.” (Pope Francis, Meeting with families - Address of His Holiness Pope Francis, Mall of Asia Arena, Manila- 16 January 2015). What are we doing to protect the unborn in our families and communities?

Action

As an act of repentance, what can I (we) do this week in line with the above sharing?

Spontaneous prayers

Allow time for those who wish to make a petition in prayer on behalf of the group. Our Father ... Hail Mary ...

Closing prayer (Use the one on page 5)

Week 5 - Violence and the crisis of national security

Opening hymn (Lenten hymn)

Opening prayer

Merciful Father, send forth your Spirit upon us the people of Southern Africa. May we hear anew the voice of Jesus Christ, inviting us to walk with him across the turbulent waters of our time: "Courage, it is I. Do not be afraid."

By the grace of the Holy Spirit empower us to bring comfort to the restless, hope to those who despair, healing to victims of violence and reconciliation where there is division.

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Brief Introduction

One of the problems we face in the three countries is the culture of violence and the need for healing for those traumatized as a result of the violence. The three countries are all facing the challenges of dialogue, healing and reconciliation.

The role of the government and politicians

How satisfied are you with the way the government is handling the culture of violence, national security and the demands for dialogue? What more should the government do to end this problem?

Our role as ordinary citizens and as Christians

Is there a role that we as ordinary citizens can play to address social trauma, the culture of violence and the demands for dialogue?

Sharing our personal experiences

In your community and in your family, what has been your personal experiences of family violence: violence against the unborn, violence between husband and wife?

What has been your experience about violence in the communities: school violence, violence in the farms, violent protests, violence against foreigners, state violence and police brutality?

In your community, workplace and parish, what has been your experience of tensions and fights based on racial, ethnic and political differences?

What has been your experience of being healed from the trauma linked to violence in your family, community and country?

Being challenged by the Gospel and the Catholic Social Teaching

“Blessed are the peace makers” (Matthew 5:9) What have you done to become a peace maker in your family, parish, workplace, community, country?

“Family is the best setting for learning and applying the culture of forgiveness, peace and reconciliation.” (Pope Benedict XVI, Africa Munus, 19 November 2011, Par. 43). What are you doing as a parent to make sure that your family becomes a school to teach your children forgiveness, peace and reconciliation?

What have you done to challenge those involved in violent protests and other forms of violence in your community?

Action

As an act of repentance, what can I (we) do this week in line with the above sharing?

Spontaneous prayer

Allow time for those who wish to make a petition in prayer on behalf of the group. Our Father ... Hail Mary ...

Closing Prayer (use the one on page 5)

