

LOCKDOWN DAY 84 – 18 JUNE 2020

Good day dear brothers and sisters connected to False Bay Diocese,

Scripture: John 12:20-26

Song: *Unless a grain of wheat shall fall*

Today, in the church's calendar, we commemorate Bernard Mizeki, one of our African martyrs of the nineteenth century. Originally from Mozambique, Bernard came to Cape Town for work, and there was converted to Christ by the Cowley Fathers. Bishop Knight Bruce asked him to accompany him to Zimbabwe (then known as Rhodesia) where a new diocese had recently been formed. There he settled as a catechist at Marendellas, preaching the gospel to the Shona people. The success of the missionaries aroused opposition. Pressure which colonialism imposed on African society found local expression, when a bad harvest gave Bernard's enemies their opportunity and they were quick to blame the Christians for the disaster. One night Bernard was attacked in his hut and left for dead. With his wife's help he crawled into hiding in the bush where she secretly cared for him but on the fifth night she found him dead. His widow told how, like the first Christian martyr St Stephen, he was strengthened in his last hours by a vision of the risen Christ. Though Bernard died alone, the many churches dedicated in his memory confirm our Lord's words, 'A grain of wheat remains a solitary grain unless it falls into the ground and dies; but if it dies, it bears a rich harvest' (John 12:24).

From Bernard Mizeki we learn that Christ is always with us. Jesus says "*And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*" In return, Jesus is asking us today: "*Are you always with me?*"

Last night our President announced the lifting of some Level 3 lockdown regulations to further open-up the economy and preserve livelihoods. He then turned to address the nation as a man, as a husband and as a father regarding the violence being unleashed on women and children with a brutality that defies comprehension. He said and we know that these rapists and killers walk among us. They are in our communities.

The Guild of Bernard Mizeki is an organisation of men. As your Bishop, I address all men in our Diocese today. Over the past few weeks, no fewer than 21 women and children have been murdered. I ask that you stand up and speak out against Gender Based Violence. I ask that you focus on getting help yourself if you find that you are driven to abuse women and children rather than protect them. Make it a priority to stop other men in their tracks who are your neighbours and in our communities who do not respect women and treat them as their possessions and not that they are equal in dignity or status. We often know who the perpetrators are and we condone their actions, we cover up rather than intervene and condemn what they are doing. Our President also touched on the effect of alcohol abuse on levels of violence.

As men, when you are in the company of others who are not drinking responsibly, would you please break up the party and say that not in your name will you allow reckless behaviour and degradation of women. Young men, I am addressing you as well. We agree with the President that it is not alcohol that rapes or kills a woman or child. Rather, it is the actions of violent men. Our silence has serious consequences. God hears the cry of our women and children, are we hearing God crying out to us?

The Covid-19 pandemic is turning the world, there is death and we pray for the season of resurrection and new life to come soon. Jesus knew his own life would be cut short. Bernard Mizeki's life was cut short. We pray that light perpetual will shine on all those whose lives have been cut short due to the pandemic of Covid-19 and Gender Based Violence. My people we do need a breakthrough. Men of the Diocese I believe in you to be the channels of the breakthrough and healing of the nation, with God's help. Together you can do it. Jesus gives us the metaphor of a single grain. Held in the hand, it is useless. It needs to be put into the

ground, where it breaks down as if its dead. From that death life grows, a plant with many grains that can be used for food.

Bernard Mizeki members and men of our Diocese, what do you need to be ready to lose in your lives in order to gain life? I invite you to attend to those things that really matter, life that is full and generous and truthful for yourselves and those entrusted to your care. None of us can any longer afford to take the road of avoidance, to forget about or ignore Gender Based Violence. Help our society to face up to Gender Based Violence and take risks for the sake of love, truth and saving lives. I have confident hope and expectation in all the men in our congregations that you will make the sacrifice of transformation to come alongside our women and children so that they may reach the full flowering of God's design. The promise is that it is God that accompanies you and gives you the strength and courage to do what is right to bring the full flourishing of life.

Congratulations Guild of Bernard Mizeki on your Feast Day. Thank you for your ministry and mission in our Diocese. Remember our Thursdays in Black campaign towards a world without rape and violence.

Today, please **reach out** to any Bernard Mizeki member.

In **our prayers** we give thanks for the discovery of the dexamethasone drug which will help the severely ill on ventilators. We give thanks for the breakthrough and pray for ongoing trials of this drug. We pray for our men's organisations and for all of us that through us restoration will come as people do what is right from inner conviction and desire. We pray for perpetrators and victims of Gender Based Violence. We pray that all Frontline workers will be protected from illness. Lord in your mercy. Hear our prayer. Amen

I am, Because we Are, Because God is ...Opening hearts to heal God's world. *Actions speak louder than words.*