

LOCKDOWN DAY 139 – 12 AUGUST 2020

Molweni family and friends of False Bay and particularly our dear Altar Servers,

Scripture: 1 Samuel 1

Hymn: *Hands that have been handling Holy things*

Yesterday, we reflected on the life and witness of St Clare of Assisi. Today's reflection is dedicated to the Guild of the Servants of the Sanctuary, known in our Diocese as the Chapter of St Clare of Assisi, having developed from the Chapter of St Francis of Assisi Cape Town Diocese.

The Scripture of 1 Samuel 1 is of importance to the Chapter of St Clare of Assisi. Samuel was a very important figure in the Old Testament, the leader in Israel who oversaw the transition from the time of the judges to the monarchy in 1050 BC. Although his descent was from the priestly tribe of Levi (1 Chronicles 6:33-38) he was born into an ordinary family to devout parents, Elkanah and Hannah. They travelled annually to offer a sacrifice and worship to God in Shiloh (1 Sam 1:3). This was, of course, before Jerusalem was established as the centre for worship and before the temple was built.

Dear Servers, the narrative of Samuel's birth has a lot to teach us. The great leaders that God uses do not come from perfect families, and you and Samuel are no exception. The Church and the Guild of the Servants of the Sanctuary should welcome all people and be there to help them in their struggles. Due to Covid-19, we have not been able to worship in our church buildings for a time, to protect the health and well-being of our people and our communities. You have not been wearing your red cassock and white cotta or surplice but the **lifestyle of being the presence of God** wherever you are, means that you continued to be the church.

In all my dealings with the Chapter of St Clare of Assisi, I have had positive experiences. Members have shown respect to me and towards each other. During this Covid 19 pandemic, I encourage our Servers to wear masks when you leave the house, observe social distancing and hand sanitising. Your lives matter. St Clare of Assisi was known to have a fine mind. Our students and learners, who are Altar Servers, do not neglect your education in these difficult days. Develop your mind. Another quality that we learn from St Clare, is that she persevered. Please pray for this gift of perseverance, of not giving up.

Your calling to be an Altar Server is a **high calling**. Members of the Guild seek to deepen their spiritual lives and become worthy of their high office. Your objectives are to pray daily, to attend church regardless of being on duty, to say the Guild's collects at least once a week. To be ready to assist a fellow member, whenever, wherever, and however the opportunity may occur. I encourage you to diligently pray the Collect of St Clare of Assisi and the Altar Servers Guild Collect every day during lockdown, this will help you to stay connected with God and with each other in spirit.

In the Bible reading of today, we hear that the priest Eli, falsely accuses Samuel's mother of drunkenness (verses 12-14). For Hannah, what should have been a place of solace becomes instead a place of condemnation. If you have been accused falsely along the way on your journey as an Altar Server, please do not walk away from the church. Come back. How can we help you? What needs to be changed and put right? Fortunately Eli's tone changes (17) and Hannah's intense prayer and vow to God (10-11), combined with Eli's blessing, lift her spirit (18) even before her prayer for a child is answered and the conception and birth of Samuel (19-20). If you are that parent, that mother, that Altar Server who had a problem with the church, take courage from Hannah. Follow her example. When we bring our problems to the Lord in faith, through prayer our burden can be lifted even before the problem is solved.

In yesterday's reflection we learnt how the mother of St Clare of Assisi was praying for her unborn child and the Lord responded. Before her birth, Clare's mother received a sign that her daughter would be a light of God in the world. Altar Servers, you are to be the light of God in the world today. In you God is well pleased. St Clare had little interest in luxuries. Her joy was to humbly serve others.

Today, we learn that Hannah's anguished prayer to God, strongly influenced Samuel's destiny even before he was conceived. Perhaps, in the life of the church and in our family life, we should pray more not only for our children but for our unborn children as well. The story of Samuel takes place in a highly patriarchal society, yet we see the significant impact of a devout mother.

A few years after the birth of Samuel, Hannah took him to Shiloh as a very small boy to dedicate him to the Lord (1:24-28). Samuel and our Altar Servers remind us that even at a young age, children can worship God. See also Psalm 8:2 quoted by Jesus on Palm Sunday.

In view of 1 Sam 1:28 and Ps 8:2, encourage children to participate in worship. Unfortunately, due to lockdown restrictions and regulations, there can be no singing and dancing but they can lead prayers, read Scriptures and share their own experience of God. Make sure your response to them is encouraging, not critical. We are grateful to the Guild of St Christopher, our Sunday School Guild, for weekly Sunday School lessons prepared in Archdeaconries and shared with the Diocese.

The focus of Hannah's prayer is not on Samuel, the gift, who is not even mentioned, but on God, the giver, to whom she is giving him back (1 Sam 1:27-28).

Sadly, in this Month of Compassion and Women's month, the suffering of our children and young people may at times be stemming from the careless living of adults. Let us not be the cause of our children being traumatised. It is not God's will that we fail and disappoint our children. God speaks to us today with generosity and mercy, calling us to look at our relationships with our Altar Servers. God has been our help and guide and is knocking at the door of our hearts. It may be that we have to own up that we have let our good intentions for spiritual growth for ourselves and our families, go sliding down the gutter.

In this cold weather, I notice that in some areas our children do not even have warm socks. As it is the month of Compassion, I want to encourage the parents of altar servers to have a drive to provide socks for our school children, beginning with altar servers in your own or next-door congregations. You may also speak to the Social Development department of the Diocese, should you want to make a donation. They know where the greatest need is.

My dear Altar Servers, the pressures of life may knock us down, but Jesus takes our hand and raises us up again. Choose your friends carefully. Do not choose friends who will lay you low, sap your energy and draw you away from the good things you want to do. Thank you for responding to the call to be Servers in our Diocese, offering your lives to be people with a purpose. You have chosen well, and we salute you. St Clare of Assisi lived her life to **love and serve God**. May you follow her example. **Totally love God who gave Godself totally out of love for you.**

Please reach out to any member of The Chapter of St Clare of Assisi, our Diocesan Servers Guild. Look around you and remind yourselves how you were formed for leadership in the church by being an Altar Server. Reach out and thank that person who influenced and nurtured you.

Prayers: Pray for the children and unborn children of your congregation and family, the pregnant parents. We pray for all children and young people with any form of disability, those suffering from any illness at this time and who may have mental health problems. We pray for the chaplain, leadership and members of the Guild of the Servants of the Sanctuary. Hannah's prayer and its results; bring to mind the line *Take it to the Lord in prayer* from the well-known hymn, *What a friend we have in Jesus*. We pray for ourselves, that we may make and find time for personal and family prayer. Teach us Lord to rest our restlessness in you. Through Christ our Lord. Amen

I am, Because We are, Because God is ... Opening Hearts to heal God's world. *Happy Wednesday*