

LOCKDOWN DAY 141 – 14 AUGUST 2020

The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Molweni dear family and friends of False Bay Diocese,

Scripture: Luke 1:46-55

Hymn: *For Mary, Mother of the Lord*

Tomorrow is the Feast day of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The glorious Assumption of Mary body and soul into heaven is a singular privilege that was conferred on her because it was fitting that she who was the living tabernacle that contained Jesus should not taste death but after her sojourn on earth be assumed into heaven. What an honour was bestowed on Mary our Mother. But the honour that she received went not to her head but to her heart for in her *Magnificat* she praises the Mighty One who has done great things for her and who lifts up the lowly. What a lesson for us to learn! The good and great things that we experience in our life always redound to the goodness and greatness of God. To God alone be praise and glory!

It was fitting that she who had shared in the sacrifice of her Son on the Cross should also share in his glory. It was fitting that the handmaid of God should be honoured as the Queen of heaven.

Mary is blessed among women. Archangel Gabriel said so. In union with all the loving children of Mary we say, *"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb."* The Ark of the Covenant which carried the tablets of the Law was the precious treasure of the chosen people. Mary is the true ark, she carried not just the Law but the Law-giver Himself. Mary is the mother of humanity. Truly all ages and people call her blessed.

Mary is blessed because she heard the Word of God and kept it. Mary is blessed because she trusted in the Lord's words. Mary is blessed for her humility. She says yes to God in all things. That is the secret of her greatness and holiness. She gave herself to God in total self-abandonment, and lovingly and diligently carried out her duties as a parent and spouse. Mary's Assumption is her perfect fulfilment, the fruit of her humility, obedience and love. It is also the divine acknowledgement of her perfect conformity with Jesus the Lord. Besides, it is the model of the Church answering the call of the Lord to be with him in his glory. It is moreover a constant invitation to every Christian to aim at the final fulfilment of heaven.

Mary stands out as a model for all Christians, of what it means to be a partner of God in the work of salvation. In her song she gives an electrifying expression to the rising hopes of millions to be free from the exploiting, domineering and dehumanising forces. **She is the liberated and liberating woman.** She was generous and went to help her cousin Elizabeth. In the song she sang on meeting her she expresses her delight in God. She acknowledges her own lowliness and God's greatness and praises God. She thanks God for the wonders God did in her: *"The Almighty has done great things for me, holy is His name."*

Mary continues her song, *"He has deposed the mighty from their thrones, and raised the lowly to high places."* How true are these words in our time?

Let us take a moment to reflect on genuine freedom in its deep interior sense. Jesus our Lord says, *"The truth will make you free"* (Jn 8:32) *"Those who are led by the Spirit of God are called to freedom"* (Gal 5:13) And they will enjoy *"the glorious liberty of the children of God"* (Rom 8:21)

We ponder the meaning and impact of *National Women's Day*. A commemoration that stems from a great march of about 20 000 women to the Union Buildings in Pretoria on the 9th August 1956. They were women of all colours, different backgrounds and beliefs, religious and economic status but all with one purpose. To present a petition to the then Prime Minister expressing their disgust, sadness, protest and non-acceptance of the pass laws that required every black South African to carry a pass, then in a most derogatory fashion called a 'dompas'. Let us remind ourselves of our atrocious history that required South Africans born in this country, born on this Continent to carry a pass on their person wherever they went and failing to do so, caused many black South Africans to be intimidated, mistreated, manhandled and

even imprisoned. However, the irony of that situation was that non-South Africans residing here in South Africa from Europe, England and other places were allowed to come and go as they please with no restrictions. So, the mothers of our nation marched in a most dignified manner to Pretoria to demand the Government to repeal the pass laws. I remind you of this history because should we forget we stand a definite chance of repeating the mistakes of the past. Let us remember the women of our land who participated in that first march of 1956, many now having gone to their eternal rest.

As we honour Mother Mary, we honour the sacrifices our mothers made for the greater freedom and liberation of our beloved land. As we celebrated National Women's Day and continue to celebrate Women's month, it is against the unacceptable levels of crime and violence being perpetrated against millions of women. Femicide is one such evil.

Femicide is the **extreme case of Gender Based Violence**. The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines **femicide** as the intentional murder of women because they are women. In most cases, it is the killing of women by a man close to them – a husband or boyfriend or an ex-husband or ex-boyfriend, a person you know or trust. It may also occur in cases of sexual aggression by a strange man. In 2019 it was reported that around 51% of women have experienced violence at the hands of their partners and over 2 700 of these cases resulted in murder.

Numbers of femicide cases have risen all over the world during Covid 19 as women are stuck in confined spaces because of the lockdown. My dear brothers and sisters **speak up** where you see or hear violence perpetrated against women and **do not look the other way** – even if it is your husband, brother or son. We ask men to **take counsel** and act – your silence is equal to approval. This is the only way we will protect our mothers, our sisters and our daughters.

A nation's ideals and aspirations as a people are set forth in its national anthem. Many nations sing of war and conquest. South Africa sings a hymn to God: Nkosi sikelel' Afrika/God bless Africa. Lord hear us. Lord save us. End the wars of distress. The call is to come together and stand united. Our national anthem ends with 'Let us live and strive for freedom, in South Africa our land.' Nkosi Sikelel iAfrika is based on a Christian hymn originally composed in 1897 by Enoch Sontonga, a Methodist mission school teacher. Let us live up to what we sing!

Mother Mary is glorified in heaven; Mother Africa is still struggling to find food, clothing and homes for many of her children. Let us all learn to be thankful and humble like Mary so that following her footsteps on earth, we shall follow her into the glory of heaven.

Reach out to any woman who you have drawn inspiration from, opening our spirits as Mary did, thanking her for being an example of how to strengthen faith.

Please join me in **praying** with the people of Northern Mozambique, in our Province. For our three bishops and families. They are experiencing conflict caused by insurgents loosely called Isis.

Closer to home, Prof Nico invites us to pray to the Lord to let women and men work together for gender justice and equality (Gal 3:28). Let us mobilise together. Let us take concrete actions and steps for gender justice. Let us muster all our resources together. Let us with discernment drink from our rich intellectual, religious, cultural and social wells. Let Women's Month and National Women's Day be impulses, inspirations and mobilisers for gender justice every month and every day of our lives.

Mary of the Annunciation, teach us how to respond with faith to divine mystery. Amen

Later today, I will be informing the Diocese of our plans for re-opening our churches for in-person worship. I will write to the Clergy and Churchwardens and will also record a voice note.

I am, Because we Are, Because God is ... Opening Hearts to heal God's world. *Have a blessed weekend.*