

REFLECTION OF THE RIGHT REVEREND MARGARET B VERTUE, BISHOP OF THE DIOCESE OF FALSE BAY

PAUSE, PONDER AND PRAY – 2 JANUARY 2021

My dear Clergy and People of False Bay and our friends, we have had a bumpy start to the beginning of the New Year with many deaths, including two of our clergymen, Revd Isaac Heyns and Revd Joy Klimbashe.

We were hoping for a peaceful start to the new year. The Covid 19 pandemic has not allowed for that. Like Mary, we ponder these things in our hearts. Allow me to walk with you today as your Bishop, to pause, pray and ponder with you.

I want you to stop for a moment with whatever you are doing and ponder for a moment on your woundedness, of having to deal with the dark clouds of death and dying. We have been busy and have just pushed our painful feelings aside. I am inviting you to take it all in. Allow God's Spirit to work with your memories.

Look back and give thanks for the gifts given unto us by those who have died. The passing away of the person may have been after a long fight or sudden. They have enlarged our hearts, our capacity to love. You may not have had an opportunity to say your goodbyes but remember their smile, their gentle touch. What is the one thing that you want to offer to God in thanksgiving for all the gifts God gave you through the person who has gone home to be with God?

The first two days of the New Year have been dominated by death. We look further back into 2020. As we pause, pray and ponder, hear your departed loved one say that he or she is proud of you. You are doing well. When we were together, you went out of your way to give me affirmation. Your loved one is saying to you 'I am totally free and filled with the Spirit of God.'

In the quietness of your own heart, listen to the voice of God and the voice of your loved one saying 'you did well. You are my beloved child with whom I am well pleased.' Place this encouragement before God with thanksgiving. Make a conscious effort to let God into your heart.

In the sacred circle of God's love, we now review those moments that we regret. When we were irritable, impatient, short tempered, selfish, frustrated. It may cause us to weep and that is okay. Tears wash and revive the soul. We confess our guilt, our pain, our emptiness that we have pushed aside and we look to God. Review that and place it before God. Ask God to forgive you, to heal you, to give you strength. God says do not carry your guilt any longer. You are forgiven. Experience the joy that the Angel Gabriel, the angel of the Lord brings to you.

The months of continued lockdown and the first two days of the new year may have paralysed us a little bit. The uncertainty of 2021 may be holding us back a bit, I offer you the poem of Minnie Louise Haskins that King George VI quoted from in 1939:

And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year: 'Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown.' And he replied: 'Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way.' So, I went forth, and finding the Hand of God, trod gladly into the night. And He led me towards the hills and the breaking of day in the lone East.

Family and friends, we remain Prisoners of Hope (Zechariah 9:12). We will meet hope and fear in this new year. We pray to the Lord to give us the graces we need for the year. God's love is our central and foundational grace. God's love is a bottomless sea. Pray to be saturated with God's love so as to return that love in your ministry with your whole, mind, soul and strength. God is deeper than our heart beat.

I encourage you to pause, ponder and pray every day at noon and end with the Prayer for the Coronavirus pandemic. Use the Prayer for Africa as well.

Lord God, in this season of fear and uncertainty, as the whole world faces the threat of the coronavirus. Grant us the wisdom and determination to walk in one another's shoes. The confidence and humility to draw closer to you and those affected and infected by the virus. Empower us to pastor those who are ill, to weep for the dead, to support the healers and to care for and love one another. May the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us now and always.

I am, Because we Are, Because God is ... Opening hearts to heal God's world. Amen.

Bishop Margaret B. Vertue, Bishop of False Bay