

Reflection -

Homily on Nelson Mandela by Archbishop Thabo Makgoba



On the international stage, the name Nelson Mandela is synonymous with the universal struggle for human rights, freedom and the fight for democracy, issues that resonate just as strongly today as they did when he himself walked free from prison 23 years ago. Today, this Nobel Peace laureate is revered around the world as an inspirational symbol of peace and forgiveness. He acts as a powerful and continuing reminder that individuals do have the power to make change happen in the world, no matter how mighty the obstacles might be. The vision of hope I am talking about from the Romans and Isaiah's passage read today.

So, how do we celebrate Madiba's lasting legacy to the world? To some, he is one of the world's most revered statesmen, who has inspired generations of global citizens through his leadership in the struggle to replace the apartheid regime of South Africa with a multi-racial democracy. This legacy will undoubtedly be one of continuing inspiration. To many, Nelson

Mandela is regarded as the greatest statesman in the world. His political leadership steered South Africa through the most difficult time in its history, all the while never succumbing to political pressure, never compromising his ideals or principles, and never pandering to the world's media. He will go down in history as one of the world's greatest leaders because of the impact he had, not just on the lives of South Africans, but on the lives of countless people around the world; he has made an irreversible difference to the global fight for democracy and human rights – or put differently the values of the Kingdom or radical hospitality that today's bible lessons say we must usher in during our time, in the likeness of Christ for God's glory and for the good of his people and creation.

Since leaving public office, Nelson Mandela has continued to be an inspirational advocate and champion for peace and social justice, both in South Africa and around the world, inspiring change where conflict and

human rights abuses still exist. His establishment of highly respected and influential organizations such as the Nelson Mandela Foundation and The Elders, an independent group of public figures committed to addressing global problems and easing human suffering, continue to make a difference. Perhaps one of his greatest legacies to both South Africa and the world is his vocal advocacy of AIDS awareness. As far back as 2002, Mandela became a highly vocal campaigner for AIDS awareness and treatment programmes in the country, confronting a culture where the epidemic had for many years been fuelled by a combination of stigma and ignorance. On a personal level, the impact of HIV/Aids was deeply felt as the disease later claimed the life of his son Makgatho in 2005, just as it did the lives of thousands of South African citizens during that period. His inspirational and passionate voice on the subject of AIDS awareness, contributed to the change in attitudes and behaviours being experienced today in the country as South Africa sets its sights on working for an AIDS-free generation.

Over the years, Nelson Mandela's contribution to the betterment of the world and humanity as a whole has been recognised through the highest accolades, awards and recognition being bestowed upon him, the legacy of which continues today. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize

for his efforts on behalf of his country and his people, sharing the 1993 prize with F.W. de Klerk, the last president of the apartheid era who worked with Mandela to end the scourge of apartheid. He was the recipient of the prestigious U.S. Presidential Medal of Freedom and the Order of Canada, becoming the first living person to be made an honorary Canadian citizen. Nelson Mandela is also the last person to have been awarded the rare Lenin Peace Prize from the Soviet Union, and the Bailiff Grand Cross of the Order of St. John and the Order of Merit, awarded to him by Britain's Elizabeth II. There are many more prestigious awards that would take too much to mention during this service – we are grateful to God that the human family saw it fit to these honours bestow upon this son of our soil, Madiba.

Perhaps his greatest legacy can be summed up as the continual inspiration he has provided – as the one leader who has worked tirelessly to make change happen by appealing to people's common humanity, and by leading by example – to many other leaders around the world who are still trying to achieve such change in their own political and social environments. Past US President, Bill Clinton, has said of the impact Madiba has had on him personally over the years: "More than any human being, Madiba has been the great inspiration for the life I lead and the

work I do, especially in the area of HIV/AIDS... In return for everything Madiba has taught us, we each owe it to him to support his work and legacy by doing and living our own as best we can... throughout our entire lives.'

The current US President, Barack Obama, recognises the impact that Nelson Mandela has had on the world, calling him as an inspiration who has given everything to his people. Speaking on Nelson Mandela International Day on 18 July last year, he said: "Madiba continues to be a beacon for the global community, and for all who work for democracy, justice and reconciliation. On behalf of the people of the United States, we congratulate Nelson Mandela, and honor his vision for a better world".

Ultimately, Mandela's legacy exemplifies wisdom, strength and grace in the face of adversity and great challenge, and demonstrates to all citizens of the world that there is a viable path to follow towards achieving justice, reconciliation and democracy, and that change can happen through individual and collective acts of service. Through his example, he has set the standard for service to country and mankind worldwide, whether we are individual citizens, cabinet ministers or presidents, and continues to call on us all to better serve our fellow human beings and

contribute to the betterment of our communities.

Today, Madiba is thought of as Father or Tata to all South Africans but, to the rest of the world, he is undoubtedly thought of as one of the outstanding heroes of the last century, alongside other inspirational global leaders such as Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi. Each of these individuals was committed to the global struggle for human dignity, equality and democracy, and Madiba still remains a beacon of hope and an inspiration for those around the world who are still fighting for their freedom and for justice. As we look back and learn from Nelson Mandela's own long walk to freedom and reflect on his life-long dedication to instilling the values of Ubuntu, integrity and learning, his legacy is an inspiring one. It will continue to inspire generations of people to come who themselves want to change the world and make it a better place in which all citizens can live and thrive.

May Madiba's soul rest in peace. May his nearest and dearest be comforted and consoled and may we continue where he has left, the LORD being our helper.

And may this account of this fallible one man, not a saint but a hopeful and whole person, loving person and dare I say a holy man, inspire us to serve God in others and God's creation till we too are called to

God's rest and are given a perfect end.

An excerpt from a homily delivered by the Most Rev. Thabo Makgoba, Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, at Holy Cross Church, Nyanga, Cape Town on the Day of Prayer and Reflection for Nelson Mandela on Sunday, Dec. 8, 2013.