



RECTOR'S REPORT



Annual Parish Vestry, Sunday 06 March 2022

My sisters and brothers at St Oswald's, St Francis and St Luke's, I greet you all in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. I am immensely grateful to God, that we could have an in-person gathering for our Annual Vestry 2022 today.

It is fitting and appropriate, as we gather for vestry, on the First Sunday of Lent, to do so in the setting of the Eucharist: The Great Thanksgiving. The gospel passage from the gospel of Luke, chapter 4:1-13, is a beautiful story of how Jesus was baptized in the river Jordan and '*was full of the Holy Spirit.*' A commentator on the passage from WORD AND WORSHIP mentions, that there was no part of Jesus that was not filled with the Spirit of God. Being filled with the Spirit, it was the Spirit that led Jesus into the wilderness. It was in the wilderness that Jesus fasted, and for 40 days and nights he experienced the temptations that we, as human beings, inevitably experience on life's journey. Peter Abelard is more specific while pondering on the temptations of Jesus. He concluded that Jesus experienced the three things that will tempt human beings in life, namely the temptations of the world, the flesh and the devil.

In the first temptation, the devil taunts the Son of God and invites him to turn the stones into bread. The devil is hoping that Jesus will give in to his hunger and seek to be satisfied by what the devil offers him in the world, rather than follow God's higher path. Though Jesus is very hungry, he replies that people do not live by bread alone. In other words, it is not only bread that gives Jesus meaning in life; it is more than that. Giving Jesus what the flesh hungers for, is not what will ultimately bring meaning and purpose in life.

Secondly, the devil reveals all the kingdoms of the world to Jesus, all the powers and authorities that could bring glory to him if he would worship the devil. To this Jesus replies, 'You must worship the Lord your God and serve only him.' Human beings will be tempted by wanting glory in life to come their way. Jesus is clear that worldly glory and power are never worth it, at the expense of taking away the glory that is meant for God.

Thirdly, the devil takes Jesus to Jerusalem, the place of highest authority, and then invites him to the highest point of the Temple, where he says, 'If you are the Son of God, then throw yourself from here, all the angels will protect and guard you, and they will hold you up with their hands so you won't even hurt your foot on a stone.'

Jesus replies, 'The scripture also says that you must not put your God to the test.' The devil knows that when we are hungry, we may be tempted to give in, but Jesus stood firm. Jesus was able to withstand all these temptations because of the strength that comes from the Holy Spirit.

What is it then, that we learn from this passage as we gather for Vestry today, and journey together on our Lenten journey?

1. Firstly, that it is the Spirit of God which is the life-giver sustaining us, and undergirding our participation in God's mission and ministry,
2. Secondly, we cannot participate with God on our own strength alone, it is the Holy Spirit that is available to us, pointing, directing and helping us to listen to God's voice,
3. Thirdly, we cannot walk the Christian journey alone. Like the Spirit who comes alongside Jesus, so must we come alongside each other.

It is only by walking in the fullness of the Spirit of God, that we will be able to overcome the wilderness of life.

My sister and brothers, usually a Vestry Report from the rector would reflect on the past year, noting the joys and challenges and generally focussing on what the parish with the chapelries did together. As you all know, the past two years have been far from doing ministry together as usual. Our lives have been disrupted by the pandemic at many levels. This has prevented us from doing what we always did. The temptation however, is to bemoan what we have been going through. As people of God, although the pandemic brought us to a wilderness experience, we will acknowledge that God's Spirit has continued to live and move amongst us in ways we could not have imagined.

We are indeed blessed with committed leadership and by the responsibilities taken on by the Wardens and Councillors in both parish and chapelries. As your parish priest, I give thanks to God for their unwavering support in ministry. As the parish executive, we met regularly, supporting each other, and together with parish council we have managed to ensure that all the necessary has been in place to continue ministry under the challenging circumstances of the pandemic.

To all parishioners: your love for God and Church in both parish and chapelries has made the responsibility you entrusted to the leadership much easier. You have enabled them, amidst their own personal limitations, to do what needed to be done. Recognising the tough economic challenges we all went through and are still experiencing, we were still able to fulfil our diocesan and outreach obligations.

Together, we are all grateful to God.

Without repeating what you will hear in the wardens report today, it is sufficient to say that the ministry of our parish and chapelries continued largely unabated. Worship services, sacramental and pastoral ministry has been managed well, given the fact that we had to do things differently. We had to adapt

quickly to Online worship, and saw a remarkably high level of engagement with our services. I am delighted to see many have found the confidence to return for in-person worship.

But that said, it is important to remember that our families, the parish and chapelries has not been spared from the ravages of the Covid-19 pandemic. Parishioners, old and young, loved ones died from the pandemic. Others lost their jobs, and have had to relocate with their families to ensure their livelihood. There are those who have decided to go abroad to find employment. Others have lived in sustained fear, especially the elderly, that the pandemic might strike themselves or their vulnerable love ones. We have all been affected. The scars of the pandemic and the trauma of the past two years will still remain with us for a long time. I am already experiencing this in my daily encounters and pastoral conversations with parishioners. Before the pandemic, there were parishioners in both parish and chapelries who played a prominent role in leadership or lay ministry and have now come to a point where they will not continue in their respective ministries anymore. This is due to personal reasons, and others have given health reasons. Others have decided to join up with a parish church closer to home.

We have also lost parishioners who died because of medical conditions and natural causes. The death on 26 December 2021, of one of our beloved parishioners, namely the Arch, was a shock to all of us. I was grateful to be a pall-bearer on the first day when the Arch's body arrived at St George's Cathedral. I was mindful of your presence with me and carried you in my heart.

At this point I want us to pause and stand, and light a candle to remember all who died during the pandemic. (Please Stand)

(A candle is lit)

One of the ministry opportunities that now lies before us, is to develop skills and the capacity to build trauma-informed care in our already existing parish ministries. It is also my intention to invite someone to come and address us in the context of our worship on trauma-informed care. This will enable us, as parishioners, to come and journey alongside each other with compassion and care.

New parishioners have joined our parish and chapelries over the past months. What I am excited about, is their previous involvement in their former parishes. We are already blessed by seeing and experiencing their participation and involvement.

As we look to the year ahead, we need to be mindful that the pandemic is still with us. We have developed the capacity to adapt and change when necessary.

The Ash Wednesday Services in both parish church and chapelries have given a good indication of what we can expect in terms of our gatherings. There is a positive outcome when alternatives are presented to parishioners when attending worship or any other form of gatherings. This is an issue we will have to continually discern, under the current circumstances. We will continue to facilitate ministry

within both parish and chapelry with confidence and care. Ministry training and spiritual formation for leadership and parishioners remains a priority. New energy has to be breathed into our parish and chapelry ministries, and all involved have to take responsibility. Maintenance of our buildings needs ongoing attention, as does the Organ Project, which needs to continue. Our Parish Lenten Appeal will enable us to kickstart the upgrade of our audio-visual system.

It is with gratitude that I express a word of thanks to my clergy colleagues and their families. To Rev's Ernest, Tembeka, Tozamile and Mxolisi, thank you for your participation in ministry. Your unselfish commitment to what you are doing is greatly appreciated. God bless you and your families.

To all Lay ministers, thank you for who you are, and participating meaningfully through your preparation and commitment in the sanctuary.

To all parish and chapelry ministries, thank you for your ministry and allowing God to use you in a special way. Your ministry is highly valued and appreciated. It is such a joy to see that the children are happy to be back at Sunday School.

Lastly, to our parish office Administrator, Deirdre, thank you for keeping the parish office flowing. The interaction with parishioners, the admin that needs to be done requires much of you and from you. We appreciate you, Deirdre.

To our parish staff, Veronica, Beauty and Luyanda, we acknowledge their contribution to ensuring that our church buildings and grounds are always neat and tidy. To them we also say, thank you.

My sisters and brothers, while we endeavour to journey forward, let us, like Jesus, always be aware of the constant presence of the Holy Spirit with us. Let us trust in God's leading hand and have confidence in the gifts and abilities of one another. It is my joy to serve with you all.

With Love,
Selwyn.
