

REKINDLING HOPE

Selected Easter messages and homilies from Catholic bishops in South Africa, Swaziland, Botswana during the COVID-19 crisis.

During the Holy week and Easter, Catholic bishops in South Africa, Botswana and Swaziland have used the social media platforms to preach the Risen Christ and inspire hope in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis. For the benefit of those without access to social media, we present a selected collection. -Compiled by SACBC Justice and Peace Commission.

Bishop Duncan Tsoke – During the Covid-19 crisis, do not be afraid, God is still in charge



It has now been several weeks since our country, like many others around the world, decided to do a lockdown as a response to the COVID-19 crisis.

Although separated during the lockdown, we are called to remain united in faith and to be in solidarity with the most vulnerable among us, the homeless, the elderly, the orphans, the migrants and refugees, domestic violence survivors and all the neglected.

Our faith in Christ can sustain and empower us through this difficult and trying times. The Spirit of God calls on all us to believe that our God is in charge

even in these chaotic and frightening times. Faith in the Resurrection is the sure sign that God is still in charge.

For many, there might be some confusion at these challenging times. Some may raise questions about loving and saving power of God, the resurrection, life after death and the COVID-19

Friends, I am convinced that God's light cannot be overcome by darkness. His love is stronger than COVID-19 and death. Do not therefore be afraid.

It is important for us to remember and find solace in

God's love which continues to conquer death in our daily life. The Resurrected Christ will be with us during and beyond this covid-19 crisis.

As we struggle with this national lockdown, let our faith give us strong sense that we are not alone but interconnected.

My prayers are with those infected and affected by COVID-19 during this difficult time.

I invoke God's blessings on all of you. Amen.

Bishop Victor Phalana–Covid-19 will not have the last word.



We are under a State of National Disaster and a lockdown. We are in pain. We are grieving. Our people are infected and affected. Others are dead. For us Catholics, the Resurrection of Jesus means that Jesus will go with us through the storm of Coronavirus.

COVID-19 WILL NOT HAVE THE LAST WORD. Christ calls us to life and he promises to remove the stone of this pandemic. He is the specialist "Stone Remover." Be strong.

I cover your family with the Precious Blood of the Sacred Heart of the Passover Lamb – Jesus the Christ! "May you and your loved ones be saved from this angel of death - of Exodus 12!

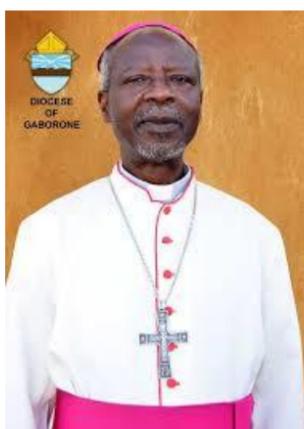
May the Angel of death PASSOVER you and your loved ones. I forbid the angel of death called Corona Virus to enter your house covered in the Precious Blood! Amen Alleluia!

May the stone - blocking your success, healing, peace, joy and courage be rolled away!!! Be free! Be delivered! Be healed! In the Name of our Risen Lord. Amen, Alleluia!!

I send you my blessing:

+ IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, THE SON AND THE HOLY SPIRIT. Amen. Alleluia!

Bishop Frank Nubuasah– God in His mercy has intervened in such occasions as these in the past and He will intervene again



The Sunday after Easter is the Divine Mercy Sunday. Therefore, I send you this message of hope and encouragement as you too turn your gaze to the Divine face of God who is merciful. If we ask Him, He will have mercy on us. Yes, we face spiritual, social, economic and personal challenges as a result of COVID-19 pandemic.

I am sure we are questioning ourselves about the devastation this pandemic is bringing to the world. There is unprecedented suffering the world over. The truth of the matter is that the poor and needy are those who bear the brunt of any pandemic.

"Mercy is the core or nucleus of the Gospel's message." said Pope Benedict. It is the name of God. It is the face with which God reveals Himself in Jesus Christ. Each one of us could identify with the frightened disciples who locked themselves in a house (John 19:20).

We are sheltering at home for fear of the coronavirus. We seek to find God in this crisis as the whole world is grinding to a halt. Thousands are dying daily. Many more in hospitals and others suffer at home.

God in His mercy has intervened in such occasions as these in the past, and God will intervene again. This is an opportunity to overcome our fears. The Feast of Divine Mercy is one of Hope. Jesus the Divine Mercy, is all loving, caring, compassionate and merciful. Amen.

Bishop Sylvester David –In this time, we might be tempted to ask, where is God in all this? The answer is God is in the same place He was when His Son was hanging on the cross.



Uncertainties surrounding us with the corona virus, the decline in the economy, fear and discomfort of not even being able to take a walk, we can easily see a cross implanted right in our midst.

In addition, many people have relationship issues. From time to time, one hear such comments as my spouse is my cross or my neighbor, my colleague, my employer etc is my cross.

Undoubtedly, many circumstances are painful. Many suffer needlessly through the cruelty and the drunkenness of those with whom they live, share the neighborhood, or workplace. But to limit the cross only these situations is not to benefit from the mystery of cavalry. How and where do we encounter this mystery? What do the Scriptures say?

Saint Paul informs us that through his bodily suffering, he shared in the cross of Christ. The implication is that when we suffer and take care of the sick and the infirm, we actually touch the cross. Why do we not see it like this?

One reason is that we have domesticated the cross and look for it only in antiseptic places. Antiseptic crosses are only found in jewelry stores. The real cross was not perfumed. But it was covered with blood, dust, sweat and tears, human suffering. So when we have to contend with sickness and impending death in the family, we actually live the cross out of the rocks of cavalry implanted firmly in our homes. It is through the cross, the real cross, that we have salvation.

Another place to find the cross is on our altars every day. Saint Paul's, in his teaching on the Eucharist in the first letter to the Corinthians, tells us that whenever we carry out the Eucharist injunction, we celebrate the Lord's death until He comes again. This is also reflected in the first two acclamations of the mystery of faith that we recite whenever we celebrate the Mass.

That is why during the shutdown we continue to celebrate Mass on a daily basis. That is why those who cannot attend Mass need to develop in their hearts a

longing for the celebration so that we shall never take such a great gift for granted any more. I wish you a deep union with Jesus who died as a lonely outcast. Does this not mirror our current situation to a great extent?

In this time of shutdown and threat of death all around, you might be tempted to ask where is God in all this? The answer is of course that God is still in the same place He was when His Son was hanging on the cross. That is why in the life of Jesus, death was not the last word. Death was not the end. God raised Him on the third day. While I cannot wish you a happy Easter, I do wish you a meaningful Easter. Amen.

Archbishop Abel Gabuza - The coronavirus should not lead us to paralysis or to suspend our ability to live with hope



During the lockdown, in various countries, including our own, we have witnessed the goodness in many people. The health professionals have been wonderful in doing their work given the various challenges faced in each context.

We have had to celebrate the Triduum in a different way. There is a saying, 'familiarity breeds contempt.' How true it is that when we

are used to the celebrations in our Liturgical Calendar, it is easy to be led to a state of apathy. Things can become too predictable.

I hope when we celebrated the events of Holy Week, we were able to take our time, meditate carefully and take long pauses in reflecting about the sublime mysterious of God.

Life has to be celebrated in whatever situation we find ourselves. Wherever you are and however you feel right now, be strong and know that God is a Wellspring of Hope. God is the Heart of Compassion. May you and your family be infused with radiant vitality. The Corona virus should not lead us to a paralysis or to suspend our ability to live with hope. Let us continue raising our voices and praying for God's healing. The wrenching of Good Friday did not have the final word in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. The new action of God was seen in the Resurrection of Jesus.

I pray that, we too, will be filled with amazement and new energy as we celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. May God be merciful upon us. Amen.

Bishop Jose Ponce De Leon -No matter what we are going through, the Risen Lord always walks with us.



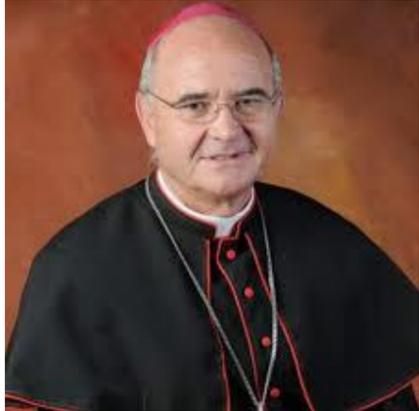
As we read about the two disciples going to Emmaus, we soon come to understand that it is not so much about the place that they were going to, but about the place that they wanted to leave.

Jerusalem was a place where all their hopes and dreams had been crushed by the passion, crucifixion and death of Jesus.

Interestingly enough, the moment that they discovered that Jesus is risen, they chose not to remain in Emmaus but to return to Jerusalem, the place where they had chosen to leave.

Being a Christian is not about running away, but looking at life under a new light, the light of the resurrection of Christ, knowing that no matter what we are going through, the Risen Lord always walks with us. Amen.

Archbishop Stephen Brislin - Despite the hardships and frustrations of the present time, the Risen Christ is with us, leading us forward, assuring us as this too will pass.



Although it was expected, I am sure the extended lockdown came us a disappointment and additional burden to many of you. My heart goes out to you, especially to those who have no income with which to buy food to feed your families, and to those afflicted by intense loneliness.

Whatever your situation is, you take strength and courage from this time of Easter and Christ's triumph over death, sin and evil.

You may feel discouraged like the disciples on the road to Emmaus. But we also take comfort as God continues to reveal Himself to us, and walks with us on our journey of life. This is what struck me anew on Easter Vigil which I celebrated alone, yet I felt the deep consciousness of your presence. I was here in this chapel on Saturday night, reflecting on the Scripture readings of the Vigil that we call creation and the history of salvation.

I was deeply struck by the powerful message of hope. God created the

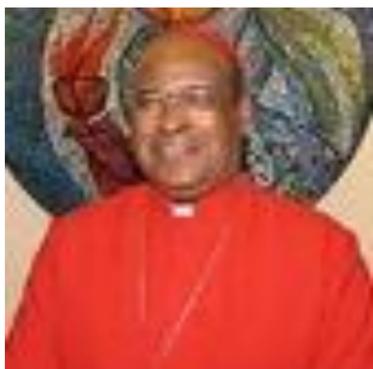
world and looked at what he had created and found it to be very good. But Even the beauty and wonder of creation is surpassed by the miracle of our salvation. God became man and gave his life for us in order that we might be reconciled to God and have new life. I think we sometimes lack this understanding and experience of being part of God's plan of salvation. We lack the sense that we are role players in the history and the present reality of God's salvific action.

Christ Himself even before He became flesh spoke through the prophets to teach, inspire and lead His people. He continues to teach, inspire and lead us today. We are part and parcel of that long chain from the time of creation leading to Christ's final victory to Christ's final victory when all will be accomplished, the time of renewal and heavenly Jerusalem. We are part of that history. We are part of the present. We are part of the future. Throughout the history of salvation, in every era, this message has been given to God's

people. Be strong. Stand firm in faith. Take heart. Have courage. And do not be afraid. Certainly, this is the message of God to us all. Especially at this Easter time, we must be strong, courageous and firm in our faith. Despite the hardships and frustrations of the present time, the Risen Christ is with us, leading us forward, assuring us that this too will pass. He is calling us to new life and to be strong and courageous on the journey to life.

In ending, I would like to acknowledge and ask you to pray for all those who are putting their lives at risk in order to serve God, their brothers and sisters, and in service to many. Think of the nurses, doctors, health care workers, police, army, firefighters, taxi drivers, those who work in supermarkets and food chains, to mention some of them. Let us all keep them in our prayers asking God to protect them. Amen.

His Eminence Cardinal Wilfrid Napier.- The lockdown has offered us an opportunity to rediscover how our homes and our families are a domestic church where we have to give full meaning to the Resurrection of Christ.



Since the lockdown started, I have been unable to shake off the feeling that the coronavirus is not a passing phenomenon, but rather a catalyst or an agent for change that will propel us into a completely new future.

I think coronavirus is going to push us from maintenance to mission. In other words, when the pandemic is over, we will not be going back to life as normal. Rather, we will be going into a completely new normal. Already people are saying after the lockdown, the government must make serious efforts to remove all the shacks and replace them with decent houses. My dream is much more about changing what is going on in the home.

Some of you have already heard me saying that God is calling us to be a very different type of church. A church with living bricks, who do not make up a church when we are in a church building, but who are the church because we live and share our faith in our family.

In a way I see my childhood experience becoming alive again to inspire and guide me on the way forward. On a farm where I grew up, it was impossible to get to church some fifteen kilometers away when the weather was bad. So my father and my mother would assemble us in the bedroom for an extended Sunday morning

prayer service. Sundays and indeed all days were concluded by rosaries and night prayer together. This is why when I heard about the term domestic Church, it was not a strange idea. It was something that I lived and breathed when I was growing up. Enough of my dreams and my memories. What do we do from here on?

During the synod on youth years ago, Pope Francis spoke a lot about the Resurrection of Christ. So it was no surprise when he gave his post synodal exhortation the title, *Christus vivit*, which means Christ is alive. In other words, his final message to the youth of the world is Christ is alive. Easter is for real.

I know some people regard the lockdown as a total disaster. They can see no good whatsoever coming from it. In a way, they are negative and despondent as the two disciples on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus. Everything that they had hoped for, everything that they had banked on, everything that they had invested their energies in, was over and done with. That was their mood as they decided to leave the church. But they could not have known and dreamed of is that Jesus would come to them at the very moment that they doubted Him most. In fact, they had given up on Him. That is when He came to them.

And what does Jesus do? He comes to them and meets them where they are in their hopelessness and it is from there that He begins to rebuild their lives and their faith. He begins by bringing them back to the basics.

He begins with God's words, first in the scriptures and then in the passion and resurrection of the word of God made fresh. Finally he goes with them into their home with them and share a meal with them, and thus celebrates the first house mass. Can you think of a stronger affirmation that Jesus sees every home and every family as a domestic Church.

It is sad to say that during these days of lockdown, there is an alarming increase in distressed calls of women and children who are being abused. I truly cannot understand how a man whom the Word of God regards as the head of the family, the defender and protector of his wife and children, can be the cause of misery and suffering to them?

This is one of the reasons why I regard the coronavirus lockdown as an opportunity for men to make a new start. Men, let us take responsibility for your family. I beg you, begin by making your home a real domestic church. That is what Jesus wants. That is why Jesus blessed a home on the very day that He rose from the dead. It is in the home that we must give full meaning to His resurrection, being the way that we too are going to overcome every type of sin and evil. We will start in the home, and then move into the community of disciples, and through that community of disciples, we will move into the society.

So when we come out of the lockdown, let us begin to be a church of the future by bringing the fruits of the Resurrection from Jerusalem, the city of the temple and Church building, to Emmaus, the village of the domestic Church, of the home. May God bless every one of you with a happy and blessed Easter. Keep well and keep safe. Amen