

Open Letter

22 June 2018

(Feast of Thomas More)

To: Politicians & Civil Leaders & Servants

“The Vomit of Poverty”

Greetings in the Lord Jesus Christ,

I write this letter in the context of the most recent riots, protest action, political musical chair situation in and around the Garden Route and in particular the town of ‘Knysna’. I write as a priest at work and in defence of the poor who have become the villains in the unbearable situation created by the very people that holds the key to the promise.

Proverbs 31:8-9 in Holy Scripture contains a hidden text which is at the heart of the witness of the church to its Lord, Jesus Christ. It says: “speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, and defend the rights of the poor and needy.”

Like king Lemuel in this text who leaves strong wine to people who need to drown their sorrows, because it may make him neglect his royal obligation to the oppressed (4-7), to get away from his responsibility (8-9) to the people, it seems we are nearing the same situation. Whose obligation is it to look after the poor, oppressed, unemployed, sick and destitute? Who must take responsibility as oath’s of office is made, promised and subscribed to the well-being of all the citizens? Some citizens have reached their point of self-care and need only minor support and assistance, but the majority are crying out for unreserved support and assistance to reach their level of self-care.

Years of empty, totally empty promises...the promise of some to be rewarded a seat at the table because of their struggle towards a free and fair society with an added bonus of a lucrative salary that will enable no more struggle and a comfortable lifestyle. They might have led the pack in advancement of the cause, but without the ones who followed from behind, change would not have come.

The cross on paper and after the lights of the victory party is dimmed?? Who will look after the poor? They did not get a seat at the table but offered it to you!! Now that you sit comfortably and numb the pain of the poor and suffering with giving “strong wine”, like payment for labour in the apartheid regime. Have you reached what you set out to do for the very people that have put you there?

You know that municipalities and departments exist to deliver basic services enshrined in the law of this land. You ignore to your own peril the poor and make them drunk with your new functions that is not your core business. Youth day celebrations with entertainers, music, v.i.p areas with comfortable couches for those who have 'arrived' and sheep pen like fences for the poor, trying to make them joyful and proclaim success after it all. It is free, you proclaim on your placards and billboards, but is it truly free?

You continue your campaign that you have delivered but it is only "strong wine" disguised as service. Still the poor are drunk in waiting for the promise to be fulfilled. A hotdog, cap and t-shirt will make the poor joyful and will maybe just hold them off from 'the uprising' just a little longer.

You leaders go to bed, satisfied knowing that you have successfully with your cat and dog politics kept the poor away a little longer. Just enough to have a good night's rest, back to your customised office, a good morning, a cappuccino and a meaty platter for the next meeting of promise without action.

This cycle of misrepresentation of the elected political leaders and the appointed civil servants will continue until the next mark on paper or the contract ends or if one is lucky, a golden handshake for keeping to the promise of no promise. Wining and dining will be available to all that keep on 'crying, moaning, asking, enquiring...when is basic services going to be delivered?

Keeping them drunk with the promise, keeping hope up when actually hope was never included in the IDP. What they do not know will not hurt them? Give more wine!!!

There comes a time and the time has come when the poor has at every event, function, celebration, gala, indaba, informative meeting eaten and drunk as much as they can and as fast as they can!! But the irritant of poverty upsets the conscience. When you realise that you have been irritated, inflamed and eroded the result comes in a reflexive activation.

It triggers the bad smell and suddenly, it moves from the joyful feet upwards...POVERTY VOMITS!!!

It manifests in burning tyres, screaming, toyi-toyi, placards, stones, barricades, sticks, glass, petrol-bombs, iron sheets, teargas, stungranades...it lies strewn all over the entry and exits...well positioned to upset as much and as many as possible.

The 'well behaved' call it unacceptable, criminal, sabotage etc.... and maybe you do to?

It is not.....

It is vomit from the poverty, the promise of a better life for all promised and suppressed for far too long. 'Aluta Continua' – the struggle continues to cries from the old and young...how long will it continue to be the song...when will it become the long expected, 'certamen est super' – the struggle is over.

So I ask, whose responsibility and obligation is it to deliver the basic services promised? You are elected and appointed 'servants of the people'. Stand up, do not sit down, and deliver on your promises as the stench on our town's streets are getting unbearable and poses a risk to us all before the point of no return and a revolt.

Please, in the name of Almighty God, get on with it! It will be good for you to remember this: "If you have been foolish, exalting yourself, or if you have been devising evil, put your hand on your mouth. For as pressing milk produces curds, and pressing the nose produces blood, so pressing anger produces strife." Proverbs 30:32-33

We will pray for you in our daily intercessions... pray also for us.

In Christ service

Fr Jerome Prins

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