

THE BISHOP'S SERMON

THE BIDDING PRAYER

YOU SHALL PRAY for Christ's Holy Catholic Church, that is, for the whole congregation of Christian people dispersed throughout the whole world, and especially for the Church in the Province of the West Indies.

You shall pray for Her Majesty the Queen, the head of the Commonwealth of nations.

You shall pray for the Ministers of God's Holy Word and Sacraments, as well as Archbishops, amongst whom especially as in duty bound, for all Bishops, and other Pastors and Curates.

Especially you shall pray for Her Excellency the Governor-General, the Prime Minister, the Parliament, the Privy Council, the Judiciary and for all those who have been called to any office of trust in this nation; That all and every one of these, in their several callings, may serve truly and faithfully to the glory of God and the edifying and well-governing of His people, remembering the account that they must give.

Finally, let us praise God for those who have departed this life in the faith of Christ, and pray God that we may have grace to direct our lives after their good example; that this life ended, we may be made partakers with them of the glorious resurrection in the life everlasting.

All these petitions we make bold to present at the throne of grace in the words which Christ our Saviour Himself has taught us , saying:

OUR FATHER in heaven, Hallowed be your Name, Your kingdom come, Your Will be done, on earth as in Heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins; As we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever. Amen.

Words taken from our first scripture reading recorded in Isaiah chapter 49, verse 5 & 6:

And now the Lord says, who formed me in the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him, and that Israel might be gathered to him, for I am honored in the sight of the Lord, and my God has become my strength — he says, “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

[Sing:] ‘Our God is an awesome God He reigns from heaven above with wisdom, power and love our God is an awesome God ... My God is awesome, He can move mountains, keep me in the valley, hide me from the rain. My God is awesome, heals me when I'm broken, strength where I've been weakened, forever He will reign...’

Oh what an awesome and mysterious God we serve, brothers and sisters. As the hymn writer William Cowper, a ‘son of a priest’, wrote in that well-known and loved hymn of ours (hymn 467 in the CPWI): “God moves in a mysterious way, His (what?) wonders to perform...[and later he says] He treasures up His bright designs and works His sovereign will.”

Yah know, sometimes we often think, and maybe because of our ignorance or our arrogance, that we always know what’s best for us, that we are wise in our thinking and what we want or desire for ourselves is best for us; and so we tell God this is what we want. I’ve surely been reminded, during the course of last year, and I’m sure many of you as well, of those profound words from the book of Isaiah 55, words that my brother Fr Tony also made reference to in his moving sermon at my Consecration, that God’s thoughts are not often our thoughts, and neither are our ways often His.

Just look at some of the stunning things that happened in our island last year. Who would have thought, for example, that all thirty of the parliamentary seats would have gone to the BLP administration by way of the elections held on the 24th May, my birthday – I don't even think that the Honourable Prime Minister and her team of Ministers (some of whom are present here) would have fathomed such was going to be the state of victory even though it made them pleased as punch?

Who would have thought that by early June, yours truly - this quiet, unassuming priest who doesn't like the limelight - would have been called out of his shell and chosen to be an Independent Senator?

Who would have thought that we would have had a Church full of commess (to use a Vincie term) in electing a Bishop and out of that commess comes one who never sought after such a post and now on this 28th day of January, becomes the 14th Bishop of this Diocese?

I was certainly as shocked as most of you (if not all of you) my brothers and sisters; and I'm even sure that my dad, the late Canon Maxwell, on the 16th November 2018, rolled over in his grave in Christ Church Cemetery when the news broke. Yah know I could even imagine him saying to the communion of saints on that day, 'I'm glad I'm not over there now so they wouldn't accuse me of having any influence in the decision of the house of bishops.' He had said something like that when I broke the news that I was considering of entering the priesthood and he was over in St Vincent working.

The God we serve, my friends, is truly a mysterious God; a God who brings about things that we can never fully understand; but yet as Christians, as God's people, we are always called to trust Him and believe that [sing] 'God is working His purpose out as (what?) year succeeds to year...' Amen.

My friends, this is a new year, and I dare say this is a new era, a new season for God to use us (and note I said us, and not just Bishop Maxwell) with greater zeal in furthering His purpose; and

for Him to take His rightful place in our lives and nation. Amen?! Did I hear the whole Cathedral Church say Amen?!

I don't think so, so let me repeat myself and hopefully I will get a louder and affirmative Amen. Are you listening and ready to follow me? I said, and I'm going to put it in this way:

'Our mysterious God is working His purpose out; and His mission, my friends, is to once again take His rightful, creative and restorative place in our lives and in our nation. He is calling not just Bishop Maxwell, but all of us into a greater spiritual communion with Him, to gather us to Himself, to raise us up, to revive us as His Church, as His people, and as His nation.' Do I hear an "Amen?!" Amen - so be it Lord, work Your purpose out in our lives, in our Church and in our nation! For we surrender all, we surrender our lives to You, for You created us to reflect Your image and likeness, You formed us in our mother's womb to be Your servants, so take Your rightful place in our lives, as our Commander and Chief, and work Your purpose out in our lives and in our nation, in Jesus Name Amen!!

But our God, my friends, is not only an awesome and mysterious God working His purposes out, but He is also a persistent God; and let me share my testimony of becoming a Bishop with you. Against all the odds, my friends, when I was as unwilling as Moses and saying to God 'not me Lord, go and choose someone else' – someone more qualified may be like the Rural Dean of St Michael, Fr Mark or the Principal of Codrington College, Dr Clarke, and when I was as stubborn as a mule like the prophet Jonah, to shun the responsibility of having to be the prophetic voice in calling an entire nation to repentance that it may seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and experience His loving mercy, and when I was out tending the sheep and minding my own business like David and not in the race among the sons of Jesse to become the next King of Israel, this God of ours, this mysterious persistent God went out of His way to call me of all persons to such a ministry, to be His servant for such a time as this, a time when our nation is faced with so many economic, social, moral and spiritual woes. My friends, I placed EVERY obstacle in God's way to avoid this day. Have you ever done that to God? Place obstacles in His way to get your own way; thinking that we can tell God what we want for ourselves even though He already has His well laid plans for our lives to be His humble servant?

Well I tried; I even prayed against it, and it didn't work. I was self-centered, thinking only of my comfort and desire to stay in parish ministry, and telling God what I want for my life, that the only time He's going to get me to move out of parish ministry is if He granted me my self-ambition of becoming the next Canon Missioner. So when I heard Him calling through the voices of others, I blatantly told them 'no! I don't want to become no bishop'; and then when it was all turned over to the House of Bishops, I then had further conversation with the Lord, telling Him 'no' as well, "not me, Lord, cause I'm inadequate, unqualified: -

- I aint got no PhD,
- I ain't no wide reader like other priests,
- I haven't always lived a modelled life,
- I ain't no fluent speaker that could preach without notes,
- I wasn't always in tune with all the runnings of this Diocese due to my teaching career,
- I have generally been a loner with no real social buddies among the Clergy,

and so with all these flaws Lord, go and choose someone else and let me just get on with the simple parish life that I want for myself, and for my wife and my boys." But the Lord, the persistent God we serve, just wouldn't let me go, He wouldn't take no for an answer; and when I got that final call from Bishop Brooks stating that the House of Bishops, after earnest prayer and reflection, had unanimously chosen me to be the one, that's when I was swallowed up like Jonah and spat out on the seashore, I couldn't run any more, I simply resigned and said 'Lord, I surrender all'; for it all hit home, my friends, that this really is not about me, not what I want for myself, it's not about my self-ambition or self-centeredness of having an easy life, it's all about letting go and letting God have His way in my life, it is all about being God's humble servant, about Him who formed me (even as Isaiah reminds us) in my mother's womb to be His servant; to be His servant in this Anglican Church and this nation of ours; for it was too light a thing for me to just be His servant priest in a parish; and so He has called me now to the office of Bishop for a time such as this. And so all I can say is 'here I am Lord, use me' and 'to God be the glory...'

And this is also be your story and response as well my friends, whether you be Clergy or Laity, for my call to be a servant is also your call, to let go and to let God have His will in your lives, to surrender all for Him to move us forward. As His people, like the nation of Israel, God has also called us all to be His servants from our mother's womb to serve Him in this Anglican Church and in this nation of ours, to move beyond ourselves, our focus on self and selfish ambitions, to move beyond the pomp and show and to be pursuant of God's will and His plan for our lives. Amen?!!!

Yah know, I should have known that God was up to something, that He had something up His sleeves, from the time Her Excellency (yes mam, from the time you) called me to become an Independent Senator during the same time our Church was battling with the election process and all the Church politics that went with it. I didn't know that it was all a "set-up" in Him preparing me for this ministry. Again, that's the mysterious, missionary nature of our God.

Your Excellency, in giving some TR – some theological reflection - on this, I now see that the hand of God was at work even in your calling me to be a Senator and you may not have known of this dimension either, but I want to thank you now publicly for your confidence in me in allowing me those six months to serve our nation as I now move on to a new phase of serving our God and our nation in this Diocese. But let me also hasten to add, and say to this Church and the people of Barbados, that although I have left the House of Senate – and have now been succeeded by one who is more than capable for the task in the person of Senator the Rev John Rogers, and I congratulate you publicly as well sir - I will continue to monitor the political, economic and social landscape (and of course the moral affairs) of our nation and the voice of this Church will certainly be heard as God's Holy Spirit prompts me to speak at any given time on His behalf.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, God has called us to a new season. He has called us to a new season of earnestly working with Him on His mission of transformation, to transform what appeared (and maybe still appear) to be a disastrous situation within the life of our Anglican Church and a

dismal outlook for our nation with the state of the economy and the increased rate of unemployment, crime and murders.

He calls this Church (and by extension this nation) to a season of renewal, reconciliation, recommitment, revival, restoration and re-energizing (wow! all the r's) as we humbly open-up ourselves, our hearts, our souls to experience God's love, to encounter God's redeeming, saving and transformative work that He longs to fulfil in our lives.

If this was not a new season for our Church, my friends, I boldly say (as probably the apostle Paul would have said) that I would not be standing before you this night as your Bishop; because I'm not about maintenance only but more so I'm about our Church joining in and becoming intentionally involved in God's restoration mission for this nation and for His world. He knows my heart and soul, He knows my passion. He knows that I'm **not** one who stands for business as usual and that of simply going through the motions and being locked in tradition and rituals but I have longed, as many an Anglican, for the day when our Church will have a spiritual awakening, a revival, a great passion and zeal for God and His mission of salvation and to be serious and actively involved in intentional and innovative discipleship to which our Anglican Communion is called. I hunger, and sense your hunger, for our Church to rise-up and shine (on full beam) the light of Christ in our nation as is our vision and mandate to be beacons of Christ presence in our community. It's not going to be business as usual and that's my vow; our Church needs to shake up, it needs to wake up to the realities around us and every member ministering like never before, for our nation, our people need the Lord. They (like us) need the love and saving power of God at work in their lives, they (like us) need to be rescued out of the hands of the evil one and guided by the right hand of God. So we've now got to be ready to work hard(er) for God, to be His true servants and soldiers in His Army; so those in the Diocesan Office, my fellow Clergy of the Diocese, members of the Anglican laos, it's a new day! And that new day, my friends, that new season was already been signalled last Saturday at the Consecration and I hope you felt the Holy Spirit there as we had our first ever Ordination of a Bishop in Barbados outside the walls of this Cathedral Church (and at the Gymnasium) signalling that whosoever will may come (let no one

be denied) to celebrate the mysterious workings of our God and His calling on all of our lives. Did you feel the Spirit? Praise the Lord!

Yah know, that move to the Gymnasium has been dubbed ‘a master stroke on my part’ as I would have made this request, but it really wasn’t, it was really God’s master stroke (like the master strokes of the West Indies that brought victory last Saturday as well) for that’s what God laid on my heart and desired to accomplish, and used many gifts from across our Diocese to minister to us – the young and not so young. That’s the only way I could put it to you tonight of what transpired last Saturday evening and what is about to happen in our Diocese – a call for all to be involved in ministry, it’s all in my prayer, that God will ‘tek ova, establish His plan.’ Those last words sound familiar – that the Lord will tek ova, establish [His] plan? Do you recall those words from Saturday? Well they were actually some of the lyrics to the song ‘Lord, Tek Ova’ to which our Diocesan Liturgical Dancers ministered at the Consecration. I just love the lyrics of that song and it’s actually produced by one of our own local gospel artistes, Nicovia, and let me just share some of those powerful, prayerful lyrics with you that I particularly like from verse 2 and the chorus; and they are as follow:

*Father help us be humble,
gotta seek Your face every single day,
without You we stumble
and living would be in vain
Please hear the cries of Your people,
Father save us from evil
You've chosen us for a reason,
Help us to walk in our season*

*Lord, You Tek Ova,
Lord You Move In
You are Jehovah,
You're my everything
We are your people, this is Your land*

Lord You tek Ova, Establish Your plan.

Tek ova, tek ova!

That's certainly my prayer, brothers and sisters, that God will tek ova, and establish His plan – establish his plan in my life, in your life, in the lives of all people in this nation and in the nations of this world. Amen!!

Now it is no secret, yah know, that during the course of last year our Anglican Church in this Diocese went through a serious storm, a very rough patch in its history, as I referenced earlier. Our affairs have been out there in the public domain and our Church has been called by all sorts of names. You heard them right?!

So I don't need not repeat here because we've heard them all. In the eyes of those outside the Church and even in our eyes as Anglicans, it was felt that our Church had lost its way, that our Church was in disarray, in crisis and had fallen apart due to the evidence of high tension and division that existed and may still exist between the houses of Clergy and Laity and the "politics" that were at play. Such state of affairs may have caused many of us to lose hope in the Anglican Church and no longer "proud to be Anglican," no longer comfortable with identifying with a Christian community that in the eyes of many has now been devalued, has now been downgraded to 'Junk status.' Sounds familiar?

Yah know, it was hard enough to hear that in the eyes of many, especially the millennials, we are considered a dead and boring, disconnected and irrelevant Church but now it is even heart-breaking to be described even further as a fractured, corrupt, lost and God-forsaken Church. Could our reputation get any lower than this? Is there any hope now for our Church? Any hope for our Church once again to shine, to be a light, to be a voice respected in this nation that has a word from God for the people of God? I say yes! I say yes, not because I'm now the Bishop, not because I want to simply inspire you with hope for a brighter tomorrow but because **God is still God, God is still the mysterious, persistent, missional God who transforms, who brings good out of evil simply because of His love for all of us.** God continues to have a vital mission for

His Church to carry out in His plan of salvation as He did for the people of Israel who themselves were brought low, very low during their Babylonian experience that came about because of their waywardness; but yet God, our God raised them up and called them to be a light.

As God called the nation Israel to that new day, who like us were also devalued and downgraded and called the Forsaken and Desolate during their Babylonian captivity, so too He now calls us to a new day, to a new season of returning to Him, of repenting and making our way back home to the Father like a prodigal son who is no longer focused on his agenda (as I was) but on the Father's agenda as a humble servant and do what the Father desires and requires of us that He may have His way to raise us, renew us, reconcile us, revive us and restore us to be that beacon of Christ's presence, that light for our nation.

Now over the last 5/6 years, we as Anglicans have been sensitized to the call of God to be that revived Church, to be that beacon of Christ's presence in our community and in our nation; the seeds were planted and the foundation laid through the many sermons, synod meetings, deanery meetings and commissions to discuss the strategic plan for our Diocese that was designed during Archbishop John's tenure. We have it all there, a well-laid out plan of action, and it's on paper and all in our heads concerning God's call and we know all the theological reasonings behind His call for us as Anglicans (as Christians) to be beacons of Christ's presence.

But I must say my friends, and regrettably so, that the happenings of the last year has borne testimony that this vision has not yet gone beyond the head. It remained simply a concept in our heads and has not been fully translated and practiced within our hearts. For God to raise us up, revive us and restore us, this call of God has to not only rest or reside in our heads, it has to also touch our hearts if we are to truly shine the light of Christ for all to see. It's high time now to move our vision from the head to the heart and this comes only by us allowing God to fully take over our lives, to move in and break our hearts of stone, to melt the hardness of our hearts - our hearts of greed and arrogance, of egocentricity and covetousness, our hearts of malice and vindictiveness and stubbornness and disobedience, our power-hungry and pompous and at times boisterous and insensitive hearts. We are to allow Him to break those chains of bondage, those

hearts of stone and to be changed, transformed by opening ourselves to the working of His Holy Spirit that creates within us a heart of love and joy, peace and gentleness, patience and compassion, faithfulness and kindness and self-control.

God is calling us now to have such a heart, a transformed heart, a heart that truly cares for each other, and we heard a lot about that already within the sermon for my Consecration, of our call to love unconditionally everyone; and I truly believe that the experience of last year is to be for us that 'wake up' call, that call to have such a heart even when our views or positions differ - a more loving, kind, gentle, joyful, peaceful, patient and compassionate heart. Not a spiteful heart, not a guile heart, but a loving heart.

The Spirit is saying to us 'no more lukewarm Church', enough is enough, no more going through the motions, no more simply a head thing - it's time to wake up and apply His Word to our hearts; and so God has broken us to awaken us. No more doing Church, it's time to BE the Church. No more binding ourselves to traditional rituals that don't speak to us as a Caribbean people, it's time to be contextual and enable our people to put their hearts into worship. No more doing things our way, no more coming with our own agendas, no more telling God what we want - thinking that it is more important than what He wants, for if our plans, schemes or agendas are not in line with God's and only for self-praise, pomp and show, then He breaks us to mold us and to fashion us once again to be His humble servants. That's what He did to the nation of Israel when they became arrogant self-servants and thought they could just live as the rest of the world was living; and sorry to say but at times we have been an arrogant, self-serving Church with many brilliant theologians and bosses and not enough of God as boss and we as servants. It's a new day, my friends. It's time for that Holy Spirit transformation of my life and your life, of having a servant and loving heart; and it is to such that I call us all to commit ourselves this night as we work together to be beacons of Christ presence and enable a beautiful SONrise in our nation.

But beyond the Church, my friends, I believe this is also the nature of God at work in our nation, offering us a wakeup call as He has brought us low (almost to 'junk status' as an economy), and with the high levels of crime and violence. Despite the many brilliant leaders we have had and

have, and the economic gurus of our time, despite the fact that Christianity is still the predominate faith and we have 100s of Christian denominations across the length and breadth of this island, and despite we still have free education (once again to the tertiary level), we as a nation have generally turned our backs on God and the signs are clear.

We have become again too caught up in and of ourselves, our agendas, we have no time for God, for Church, for prayer and worship, for family time, for our young people who have become disenchanted, for our suffering brothers and sisters even during these harsh economic times, we have neglected many who have been crying out for our help; and so God breaks in and God breaks us as a nation, to awaken us, to bring us back to reality, to humble us and call us to seek first His Kingdom and Righteousness, to be a nation under His governing and guiding hand, to be our brothers' and sisters' keeper as He really desires us to be. When we as a nation humble and submit ourselves to Him – to His will, then and only then will He exalt us; then and only then will He raise us up, revive us and makes us that great nation again. We don't need a "Trump," saying that he will make our nation great again, and neither can I alone as your Bishop and our Prime Minister in our own strength make it great again either, but we all simply need to be a nation in submission to the will of God allowing Him to take His rightful place in our hearts, to break our hearts of stone and empower us to love and serve Him and others as His Son Jesus Christ served – serving each other in love and respecting each other's lives and their worth and glorifying the Father by our good works.

As God, my friends, has brought us to this point in our history, when there is much doom and gloom, when the task seems overwhelming, I'm further reminded that like Moses, that like David and Jonah, that like Jeremiah and so many other servants of God, and even as I reflected in the words of our Isaiah passage for tonight, that God is to be our only source of strength for the great task ahead of us. It is in our weakness and openness and humility and even our feelings of inadequacy, that His power is made perfect as we depend solely on Him, as we let go and let God. Things may not have gone the way we would have liked them to unfold last year. Things may not even be currently going as we would like them to be. But let's continue to trust in our awesome, mysterious and persistent God, as He continues to work His purpose out and let's

rededicate our lives to work with Him as He offers us a new day. Let us stand firm as brothers and sisters of the Anglican Church and wider Christian community, with our Ordained Ministers equipping our Lay Ministers for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ, calling our lapsed brothers and sisters to return to the fold and others to join Christ on the battlefield and mission of saving our nation, for the days are evil says the Lord. It is time to rise and shine and give God the glory, to wake up to the realities of those who need us most, and in the power of God's transforming Spirit, proclaim the good news and offer a helping hand to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to enable liberty to those who are held in the captivity of sin and violence, to rehabilitate and seek release for the prisoners whose hearts the Spirit of God has softened, to comfort those who mourn and lift up the faint-hearted. It's time to be a reunited Church, working fully together on all cylinders – Clergy and Laity. It is time to be intentional in partnering with God for the transformation of our lives, our Church and our nation. It's time for a new day for a SONrise that will refuse to set, that will enable the beauty of Christ's presence to shine forth in every community. It's a new day to let go and let God do His work in our hearts, to let Him 'tek ova' and move us forward, my friends, to another level. May His will be done. Amen!!