



Southern African Catholic
Bishops' Conference



SEEKING

**GOD'S MERCY &
THE COMMON GOOD**

Lenten Reflections

INTRODUCTION

It is clear to many of us that our country is in a deep crisis. Our response as Christians should include prayer and repentance for the forgiveness of our sins. This is particularly important as the country prepares for the 2024 national and provincial elections.

The Lenten Season offers us an opportunity for prayer and repentance, what others call spiritual preparation for the elections. Political parties and secular people have their way of preparing for elections. As believers, what we have is spiritual preparation.

We are asking Catholics and all people of good will to undertake prayer, fasting and repentance for the healing of our nation.

In this booklet of Lenten Reflection, we present to you some ideas that you can use when undertaking prayer and repentance for the healing of our nation, as well as a spiritual preparation for the 2024 elections.

Among other things, our nation needs to be healed and delivered from its various sicknesses, including greed and corruption, selfishness and lack of the sense of the common good, violence and social trauma, worship of wealth and politicians, deep racial divisions and fear of those different from us.

The booklet is therefore made up of five chapters, representing the five sicknesses that continue to trouble the soul of our nation. The list of the sicknesses of our nation is not exhaustive. We invite you to think of other spiritual sicknesses from which our country should be delivered and healed.

The spiritual preparation for the elections should inspire us to vote according to our conscience, and not according to blind loyalty to a political party. It should inspire us to vote not in terms of what is good for me and my political party, but in terms of what is good for the whole nation.

If I am asking God to heal the nation from these sicknesses, it makes sense that I will make sure that, when making a conscience vote, I do not elect leaders and political parties which exhibit these five sicknesses: political parties that work hard to escape accountability for corruption and greed, political parties that tend to promote their narrow interests at the expense of the good of the nation, populist political parties that promote violence, racial division and irrational fear of people who are different from us.

May the Holy Spirit heal whatever is broken in our hearts, families and nation so that we can respond to God's call to build a more just, more united and a more peaceful nation of South Africa.

Format of the Lenten Reflections

Opening Hymn (Lenten hymn)

Opening Prayer (as below)

Group discussion: Looking at what is happening in our country

Group discussion: Looking at what is happening in our lives and in our hearts

Examination of conscience and my act of repentance for this week

Spontaneous prayers

Closing Prayer (as below).

Opening prayer (Prayer for Southern Africa)

Merciful Father, send forth your Spirit upon us the people of Southern Africa. May we hear anew the voice of Jesus Christ, inviting us to walk with him across the turbulent waters of our time: "Courage, it is I. Do not be afraid."

By the grace of the Holy Spirit empower us to bring comfort to the restless, hope to those who despair, healing to victims of violence and reconciliation where there is division.

May the Holy Spirit heal our families and communities. Grant us ethical and courageous leaders who put the good of the people before their own interest.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, we commit ourselves to speak the truth with courage, to act justly in all we do, to share with those in need, and always and everywhere to respect your gift of life as we strive to proclaim the values of the Kingdom in solidarity with all people of good will. Amen.

Closing prayer

Lord, we the people of South Africa,

thank and praise you for your inexhaustible love and the graces of healing and peace you continually offer to us as a nation.

As we prepare for the elections in 2024, send us your Holy Spirit to form our consciences according to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, so that we may choose leaders who aspire for the common good of our nation and have the fear of the Lord in their hearts.

And so, we pray the following intentions:

That the youth of our nation may register as voters and prepare themselves for voting in 2024. **Merciful God and Father, may your will be done!**

That all the officials and volunteers of the Independent Electoral Commission may be honest and diligent in preparing for the elections ensuring that all procedures are implemented according to the IEC regulations. **Merciful God and Father, may your will be done!**

That the South African Police Services may be well prepared and ensure that law and order is maintained during the time of political campaigning and during the time of voting and during the period of the counting of the votes; **Merciful God and Father, may your will be done!**

That all media companies and journalists may do their reporting and communication truthfully and with fairness to all political parties and ensure that no hate speech be allowed to be broadcast. **Merciful God and Father, may your will be done!**

That the right of voters to vote freely and in confidentiality be respected by all our leaders and people across the political spectrum. **Merciful God and Father, may your will be done!**

That as a nation we may accept the final results of the elections with gratitude and in a spirit of peace and thus acknowledge that the voting and counting was free, fair and truthful. **Merciful God and Father, may your will be done!**

That those of us who have a spirit of despair, apathy and even of hatred and violence may repent from these sins and may be filled instead with the spirit of hope and peace. **Merciful God and Father, may your will be done!**

That those of us and the leaders we choose who have a spirit of greed, bribery and corruption may repent from these sins and be filled instead with a spirit of service and honesty; **Merciful God and Father, may your will be done!**

That whistleblowers and all those who are speaking out against greed and corruption may be protected and supported by our communities and leaders; **Merciful God and Father, may your will be done!**

Heal whatever is broken in our hearts, families and communities so that we can respond to your call to build a more just, more united and a more peaceful nation of South Africa.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen

St. Francis of Assisi. Pray for us Blessed Benedict Daswa. Pray for us

THEME 1: ASKING THE LORD TO HEAL OUR NATION FROM THE SPIRIT OF GREED, BRIBERY AND CORRUPTION

Opening hymn (Lenten hymn)

Opening prayer

Group discussion: Looking at what is happening in the country

Some people say that they will not vote in the forthcoming election because all politicians are corrupt and are only interested in using politics to enrich themselves. What is your reaction to such people?

What should be done to address the problem of corruption among government officials and politicians?

Does your family, sodality and parish say prayers on regular basis asking God to heal our country from the spirit of greed, bribery and corruption?

Group discussion: Looking at what is happening in my life and in my heart

(You can use two or three of the quotes below to reflect and discuss what is happening in my life and in my heart. For each quote that you choose, you should ask yourselves: In what way does this quote challenge me to repent, change my life and return to God's mercy?)

“As we get enraged by corruption undertaken by politicians, it must be made clear that acting against it starts with you and me. At a personal level and in our workplaces, we must refuse to be part of corrupt activities.” (Bishop Sithembele Sipuka, Corruption has become South Africa's other pandemic, Daily Dispatch, 3 September 2020).

“It is alright to condemn politicians who are involved in corruption. We should, however, not forget that we ourselves are involved in corruption. Ending the culture of bribery and corruption begins with you and me” (Bishop Sithembele Sipuka, Corruption has become South Africa's other pandemic, Daily Dispatch, 3 September 2020).

“You shall not steal” (Seventh commandment)

“You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor” (Tenth commandment)

“Corruption manifests in different ways: the use of time for which we are paid for “private gain” is corruption; arriving at the office to hang up your jacket and then leaving to do private businesses is corruption; even using a telephone provided for the purpose of our work to phone family members and friends is corruption?” (Bishop Sithembele Sipuka, Corruption has become South Africa's other pandemic, Daily Dispatch, 3 September 2020).

Examination of conscience and my act of repentance for this week

As an act of repentance, what can I (we) do this week in line with the above sharing?

In the examination of conscience, you can also assess whether you have been involved in the following conduct:

Being involved in demanding bribes

Being involved in giving bribes

Committing fraud

Demanding sexual favors from one who is applying for a job or a job promotion

Demanding bribes from the one who is applying for a job or job promotion

Stealing things or money at my workplace

Fighting for property and inheritance in my family and doing this out of greed

Wanting to get money or get rich at any cost, even if it means taking short cuts.

Spontaneous prayers

Allow time for those who wish to make a petition in prayer on behalf of the group. Our Father ... Hail Mary ...

Closing prayer

THEME 2: ASKING THE LORD TO HEAL OUR NATION FROM THE SPIRIT OF NEPOTISM, THE SPRIT OF EACH ONE PURSUNG PERSONAL INTERESTS AND THE INTERESTS OF THEIR POLITICAL PARTIES AT THE EXPENSE OF WHAT IS GOOD FOR THE NATION

Opening hymn (Lenten hymn)

Opening prayer

Group discussion: Looking at what is happening in the country

In politics, the lack of the common good manifests itself when politicians become concerned with what is good for their political careers, their families and their political parties, and not what is good for the nation. What needs to be done to change this kind of behavior?

There is lack of common good when politicians and political parties use every means necessary to avoid being held to account for corruption, incompetence and mismanagement of government funds.

During elections, the lack of the sense of common good manifests itself when people vote solely based on blind loyalty to a political party, and not based on what is good for the nation.

Lack of common good is evident in the following behavior: people who are involved in dumping of waste in our communities, people who destroy

public infrastructures, people who engage in violent protests and looting.

Does your family, sodality and parish say a prayer on regular basis asking God to heal our country from the spirit of pursuing personal interests at the expense of the good of the nation?

Group discussion: Looking at what is happening in my life and in my heart

(You can use two or three of the quotes below to reflect and discuss what is happening in your life and your heart. For each quote that you choose, you should ask yourselves: In what way does this quote challenge me to repent, change my life and return to God's mercy?)

“He said to him,*“You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it:* You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Matthew 22:37-39)

Read the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37). Imagine yourself to be each of its characters: victim, robber, lawyer, priest, Levite, Samaritan, and innkeeper. Explore each character's goals, values, and spiritual imagination. How are you like each character?

“Each day we have to decide whether to be Good Samaritans or indifferent bystanders” (Pope Francis, Fratelli Tutti, no. 69).”

“In the parable of the good Samaritan, one detail about the passers-by stands out: they were religious, devoted to the worship of God: a priest and a Levite. This detail should not be overlooked. It shows that belief in God and the worship of God are not enough to ensure that we are actually living in a way pleasing to God”, (Pope Francis, Fratelli Tutti, no . 74).

Faced with our personal problems, we are tempted to isolate ourselves and withdraw into our own pain, but this can never be the way to restore hope and bring about renewal. The path we must follow is being closer to others; it is the culture of encounter (Pope Francis, Fratelli Tutti no. 30).

We must re-discover the importance of wasting time on others. This includes wasting time on those who are not our friends and those who are not members of our families. The parable of the good Samaritan tells of the “abandoned” traveler lying injured on the road. Only one person stopped, approached the man, and cared for him personally; he spent his own money to provide for his needs; he gave him his time (Pope Francis, Fratelli Tutti, no. 63).

A sick society is tempted to ignore others, look the other way, and pass by as if unaware of the reality (Pope Francis, Fratelli Tutti 64). In a sick society, when people see somebody who is suffering, they rush to take videos and pictures so that they can post them on social media. They do not rush over to help them.

Love of neighbor is manifested by the way we treat our parents and relatives

when they are old. In abandoning our parents when they are old, we fail to listen to our Lord who is asking us to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Examination of conscience and my act of repentance for this week

As an act of repentance, what can I (we) do this week in line with the above sharing?

Spontaneous prayers

Allow time for those who wish to make a petition in prayer on behalf of the group. Our Father ... Hail Mary ...

Closing Prayer

THEME 3: ASKING THE LORD TO HEAL THE NATION FROM THE SPIRIT OF VIOLENCE AS WELL AS FROM THE SOCIAL TRAUMA RESULTING FROM THE VIOLENCE

Opening hymn (Lenten hymn)

Opening prayer

Group discussion: Looking at what is happening in our country

In the previous elections, there was a problem of violence and political assassinations. Looking at the forthcoming elections, is this something that could likely occur in your area? Is there something that your parish or group can do to respond to the election violence and political assassinations?

People have been complaining about the high levels of crime, drug abuse and violence in our country. What should be done to address this problem?

Sometimes, we have what we call state violence and police brutality. Do you feel this is a big problem in our country? What should be done to address this problem?

Does your family, sodality and parish say a prayer on regular basis asking God to heal our country from the spirit of violence as well as the social trauma that our nation experiences because of the violence?

Group discussion: Looking at what is happening in my life and in my heart

(You can use two or three of the quotes below to reflect and discuss what is happening in your life and in your heart. For each quote that you choose, you should ask yourselves: In what way does this quote challenge me to repent, change my life and return to God's mercy?)

“The violence that we see in society begins in the heart. For peace to dwell in our families and our countries, one needs to start with oneself. We are so used to focusing on the hearts of others rather than our own hearts.

We cannot bring about peace in our families and in our country if we lack the ability to discover the peace that God has planted in our hearts. (Pope Francis 4th December 2018)

“Parents should remember that family is the best setting for learning and applying the culture of forgiveness, peace and reconciliation.” (Pope Benedict XVI, Africa Munus, 19 November 2011, Par. 43).

“You have heard that it was said to your ancestors, ‘You shall not kill; and whoever kills will be liable to judgment. But I say to you, whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment, and whoever says to his brother, ‘Raqa,’ will be answerable to the Sanhedrin, and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ will be liable to fiery Gehenna. (Matthew 5: 21-22)

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, offer no resistance to one who is evil. When someone strikes you on [your] right cheek, turn the other one to him as well (Matthew 5: 38-39)

Examination of conscience and my act of repentance for this week

As an act of repentance, what can I (we) do this week in line with the above sharing?

In the examination of conscience, you can also assess whether you have been involved in the following conduct:

Being violent to my wife/husband and children

Getting involved in emotional violence, always feeling insecure and over-jealousy, always wanting to control, possess and dominate husband/wife, always saying something that would belittle them.

Committing rape.

Being involved in abortion

Being involved in school violence, violence and killings in the farms, violent protests and looting.

Spontaneous prayer

Allow time for those who wish to make a petition in prayer on behalf of the group. Our Father ... Hail Mary ...

Closing Prayer

THEME 4: ASKING THE LORD TO HEAL THE NATION FROM THE SPIRIT OF WORSHIPPING IDOLS, INCLUDING THE WORSHIP OF WEALTH AND THE WORSHIP OF POLITICAL LEADERS WHO ARE POPULIST

Opening hymn (Lenten hymn)

Opening prayer

Group discussion: Looking at what is happening in the country

Some political leaders are involved in populism. An important aspect of populism is manipulating people so that they can worship you as a leader. What is your experience of the populist politicians in our country and in the world?

Those who keep more wealth than what they need in their natural life can easily submit to the worship of wealth, ignoring the worship of the true God.

Does your family, sodality and parish say a prayer on regular basis asking God to heal our country from the spirit of worshipping idols, including the worship of wealth and the politicians who are populist?

Group discussion: Looking at what is happening in my life and in my heart

(You can use two or three of the quotes below to reflect and discuss what is happening in your life and in your heart. For each quote that you choose, you should ask yourself: In what way does this quote challenge me to repent, change your life and return to God's mercy?)

“You shall have no other Gods before me” (Ex 20:3).

“The *first commandment* summons us to believe in God, to hope in him, and to love him above all else. 2135 “You shall *worship* the Lord your God” (Mt 4:10)” (Catechism # 2134)

Idolatry consists in divinizing what is not God” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 2113).

“Indeed, everything can be used as an idol. For example, we Christians can ask ourselves: who is truly my God? Is it the One and Triune Love or is it my image, my personal success, perhaps even within the Church?” (Pope Francis, 1st August 2018).

“Drugs too are idols. How many young people ruin their health, even their lives, by worshipping the idol of drugs?” (Pope Francis, 1st August 2018).

When politicians are involved in populism, they often require that we undertake idol worship of them. They become idols that we should worship. We also have idol worship of celebrities. Pope Francis once said: “The first commandment says that you shall not worship the idols. Idols need worship, certain rituals: one bows down and sacrifices everything to them. “ Is there something in my life that I am sacrificing as I worship politicians and other celebrities? (Pope Francis, 1st August 2018).

“The first commandment says you shall not serve the idols,. Idols enslave. They promise happiness but do not deliver it and we find ourselves living for that thing or that vision, drawn into a self-destructive vortex, waiting for a result that never comes.” (Pope Francis, 1st August 2018).

When we feel emptiness in our hearts, we sometimes think that we can fill this emptiness by possessing things and consuming things. Sometimes, we think consuming alcohol and drugs will fill that emptiness. Sometimes, we think fame, image, an academic degree, a position of authority will fill that emptiness. The only thing that can fill that emptiness is deep relationship with God, the love of God with all our heart and mind. We should not replace worship of God with worship of the material things, thinking that material things can fill the deep emptiness in our souls.

“The true God does not demand life but gives it, as a gift. The true God does not offer a projection of our success but teaches us how to love. Today, I invite you to think: how many idols do I have, and which one is my favorite? Because recognizing one’s own forms of idolatry is the beginning of grace and puts one on the path of love. What is my idol? Remove it and throw it out of the window? (Matthew 5)

The first Commandment strictly prohibits us from creating an idol of any kind. An idol is biblically defined as a created image or representation of a god used as an object of worship. An idol is something that distracts a person from our living God. Something that invites affection and passion. Something a person can serve, given the time or the money.

Sometimes people do not attend liturgy/Mass on Sundays and Holy days of obligation. They stay at home to relax from an exhausting workday or work week. Yet their fatigue does not prevent them from going to sporting events, the beach, swimming pools, golf courses, restaurants and other recreational venues. Sometimes, the things that we do when we are supposed to attend Mass on Sundays gradually become our idols.

People also create an idol when they serve themselves as a cult of their own “I.” Some examples of “I” idols include deriving pleasures for the body; living only for money, career and riches; and stark addictions to gambling, sports, computer games, internet or even to social media.

THEME 5: ASKING THE LORD TO HEAL OUR NATION FROM THE SPIRIT OF HATING THOSE DIFFERENT FROM US

Opening hymn (Lenten hymn)

Opening prayer

Group discussion: Looking at what is happening in our country

Some say that our country continues to be divided on racial lines. Do you believe that this is true?

What is your understanding of racism? What should be done to address the problem of racism?

Other than racism, there is a problem of nepotism, tribalism and regionalism. How big is this problem in our country?

Some believe our country does not have a problem of xenophobia. The concerns that people express are genuine, particularly issues of illegal immigrants, their involvement in crime, drugs, etc. Raising concerns about such matters does not mean that one is xenophobic. What is your view on this matter?

Does your family, sodality and parish say a prayer on regular basis asking God to heal our country from the spirit of hating those who are different from us?

Group discussion: Looking at what is happening in my life and in my heart

(You can use two or three of the quotes below to reflect and discuss what is happening in your life and in your heart. For each quote that you choose, you should ask yourselves: In what way does this quote challenge me to repent, change my life and return to God's mercy?)

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, (Matthew 5: 43-44).

“If you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift (Matthew 5: 23-24)

Some of the hatred that we have against those different from us is based on a deep sense of fear. There is a problem when fears conditions our way of thinking and acting to the point of making us intolerant, closed and perhaps even without realizing it (Pope Francis, Fratelli Tutti, no. 41).

“We pray that to you, O Lord, that we may have eyes to see what is possible when we go beyond our fears, beyond our anger, to hold the hand of our sisters and brothers who are different from us in terms of race and nationality.” (From the US Catholic Bishops, prayer to heal racial

divisions).

“No family, no racial group, much less a nation, has a future if the force that unites them, brings them together and resolves their differences is vengeance and hatred of those different from themselves.” (Pope Francis, 6th September 2019)

“Lord, make me an instrument of peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love. Where there is injury, pardon.” (Prayer of Saint Francis)

“We have unhealed wounds from our own violent history; We should allow God to give us the grace and insight to recognize that the pain we live with cannot be erased by hurting others. Jesus asks us to bless those who hurt us and pray for them. In other words, to speak of them with words of blessing, with words of life not death, to speak their names not in insult or revenge, but to establish a new bond which brings peace. It is a high standard that the Master sets before us.” (Pope Francis, 6th September 2019)

“What is the repentance that God is calling me to make in the following situations: supporting politicians who spread hatred against foreigners; believing that all the foreigners are enemies that need to be eliminated, writing or sharing messages on the social media that promote intolerance and violence against foreigners.” (SACBC Lenten Reflections 2020)

“What is the repentance that God is calling me to make in the following situations: I am an immigrant and I am involved in crime, human trafficking and the sale of drugs in my neighborhood.” (SACBC Lenten Reflections 2020)

“The true worth of the different countries of our world is measured by their ability to think not simply as a country but also as part of the larger human family (Pope Francis, Fratelli Tutti, 141).”

We should be aware of the campaigns of hatred and destruction in the social media and the way we just take them and forward them to others, without examining them critically (Fratelli Tutti 43).

In the parable of the good Samaritan, we see that love does not care if a wounded brother or sister comes from one place or another. Love shatters chains and builds bridges; it enables us to create one great family, where all of us can feel at home. Love exudes compassion and dignity (Fratelli Tutti 62).

“What is the repentance that God is calling me to make in the following situations: the fear of losing the power and privileges that I have as a white person, the fear of losing the power and privileges that I have as a black person, the habit of always thinking in terms of us and them, the habit of seeing everything through the lens of race, writing or sharing messages on the social media that promote intolerance and violence

against people belonging to the race different from mine.” (SACBC Lenten Reflections 2020)

Examination of conscience and my act of repentance for this week

As an act of repentance, what can I (we) do this week in line with the above sharing?

Spontaneous prayers

Allow time for those who wish to make a petition in prayer on behalf of the group. Our Father ... Hail Mary ...

Closing Prayer