

Congratulations to St Martin de Porres Catholic Church for seventy-five years of faithful presence in Soweto. I am grateful to be counted among the men who served at this parish as Parish priests. Out of your generosity, you allowed us to be part of your faith journey and history. Occasions like these are a good opportunity for reflection, and a chance to reorient our parish for the future, that it might be successful in its unique calling.

As a body of Christ, we are at our best when we focus our energies on sharing God's love in practical ways in the community. Seems to me, when we find ourselves distracted by busyness and controversy, we need to remind ourselves that there is something about this parish that is frankly not of this world. We need reminding that these 75 years of existence are a manifestation of God's kingdom in the here and now. Whenever we stray, we need God to pull back the curtain and show us the inspirational cosmic scope of what he is about in setting a broken creation right again and how we fit in that plan. Jesus gave us numerous stories to describe what that would look like if we took God's rule seriously. For example, in the story of the prodigal son he focused on God's extravagant love towards the undeserving, and so invites us to reflect the heart of the Father in our dealings with one another. We call that 'grace.'

Nowadays, Grace has a bad reputation in some circles as being weak and ineffective in the face of injustice and evil. The father in the story, they say, should have allowed the son to suffer the consequences of his poor choices, or at least accepted him begrudgingly, on probation, until he proved he was worthy of acceptance. The gospel stands in stark contrast to that attitude, and that is why it remains a countercultural force.

As we reflect on the 75 years of existence, do we trust that God's grace is a sufficient mark of a successful church? Are we convinced that grace is both powerful and transformative? If we knew the true breadth of the quiet suffering around us behind closed doors, we would be overwhelmed. The amount of pain people carry silently is breathtaking in its scope. Let us not add to it. Instead, we must believe the gospel to be good news, and we need to communicate in compelling ways the simple message: God made you, and you matter to God. We cannot afford to be stingy in our love for one another.

Inspired by our Patron Saint let us pray for the grace to be sensitive to the plight of the poor, the orphans, the less privileged and allow God's grace to transform us. **Happy anniversary to you all and may God bless and keep you safe.**

Fr. Nobert Munekani SJ

Parish Priest