

2020 02 09 Candle of Peace, Hope and Justice:

For Enock

It has only been three weeks since the school year started in South Africa. But it has been 3 long painful weeks since Enock Mpianzi, a South African child born of Congolese parents died, drowned at his Grade 8 orientation camp. His body was only recovered the day after he drowned, because the children who watched him get swept away were by the ignored by the adults they told.

Today we light the candle of Peace, Justice and Hope for Enock.

Enock Mpianzi, you will be remembered. When we hear your name, we will listen. It will not be like when your name Enock, was said over and over again at that camp and ignored. Now that it is too late we will listen.

Now we have to pay our respects, when we should have paid attention, and cared and shown love.

Let us pray:

Dear God, help our government leaders to focus on the real socio-political problems in our country and not only on identifying a perfect scapegoat for the public and media, so that we may not go to sleep again while the children of our country continue to get into difficulty, to struggle and eventually drown in the depths of neglect, abuse, poverty, violence, marginalisation and fear!

Lord help us to choose to respect children when they are alive and not to only pay our respects to them when they are dead. Lord, the respect being afforded to Enock in death would and could have been assurance that he could still be alive. He died in a brutal way and we should not let words like negligence, culpability, indemnity be associated with his death.

Loving God, let us examine our choices and how we as adults contribute to creating a situation where it is possible for a child (in 2020) to tell an adult that a child they met, greeted, spoke to, is now missing and for them to be ignored. When will we realise that it is race... poverty... a culture of exclusion and then assimilation that can allow a child, a child, to simply disappear under the water.

Lord, give us the courage to question why only adults will be deemed suitable to investigate Enock's death, to serve on commissions of inquiry and to draw up the new guidelines and hopefully legislation to prevent this from happening to another child. Children will be excluded from these meetings, from these decisions and from these enquiries.

Dear God let us take inspiration from the children who tried to save Enock's life in the first place, who by speaking up now will be saving him in death. But the way we choose to live is not to honour or acknowledge that children could most easily tell us how his death could have been prevented...we just have to ask them, we should ask them, they will know, they can tell us... if we listen when they tell us.

Lord help us to see that we don't have to wait until children grow up and leave school to know what is wrong, deadly or damaging in a school and its culture and historical biases, in order to change it. We can ask children now and listen and hear what they have to say and work to change what actually causes death and support and encourage what brings and sustains life and love!

I end with a quote from Henri Nouwen who says: "It belongs to the centre of the Christian message that children are not properties to own and rule over but gifts to cherish and care for. Our children are our most important guests, who enter into our home, ask for careful attention, stay for a while and then leave to follow their own way. Children are strangers whom we have to get to know."

Enock Mpianzi, you will be remembered. When we hear your name, we will remember to listen.

Let us pray the prayer for Africa:
God Bless Africa and all the world
Guard her children
Guide her leaders and
Give us peace
Amen.

Rose-Anne Reynolds