

Sunday 23 May 2021

Prayer for peace, justice and hope

For many years I had a job that made me face on almost a daily basis, the realities of life for poor people in Cape Town. If I was not supervising law clinics on the Cape Flats or in the townships, I was in the magistrates' court. Now, for the most part, I live and work in a protected bubble. It is very safe for me to drive or Uber from our quiet flat in Vredehoek to my secure parking in a secure building in Keerom Street with 24-hour security. Even were I to walk to work, I can safely do so with my laptop bag over my shoulder and the worst that happens to me is a homeless person with mental health problems wanting to engage in conversation.

Now, like many middle class Capetonians, I rely on the media and the woman who cleans my home each week to give me just an idea of the challenges of living in a township in my own City. Earlier this year she was telling me that she was looking for an old television, so that "people" would not steal it. She described how strangers would walk into your home and take something valuable, like a flat screen TV. There is no point in reporting the crime, and it is likely that the person in your community who spotted the new TV would tip-off the people who brazenly walked into your home.

That was shocking in itself. Then, two months ago Nomandile's younger brother was shot and killed after work one day as he went to buy food for his family. Today, two weeks ago her twenty-two year old daughter was raped by men with balaclavas when she walked home from visiting a friend. Distraught, she asked me why God was punishing her.

Alan asked me to mention the killings in Khayelitsha in our prayers for peace and justice today. My understanding from the media is that last weekend's killings related to revenge killings between protection gangs.

What came of the Commission of Inquiry into policing in Khayelitsha? Protection, or extortion rackets develop when the state – at any level of government – does

not protect its citizens. In Khayelitsha (and other townships) it is not just a question of being killed in the cross-fire of a revenge killing spree. What was extortion from small businesses, such as Somali spaza shops, developed into protection money being demanded from residents – poor people living in fear.

Protection racketeering as a means of extracting money, whether in the townships or in Long Street, feeds on fear which the protection gangs must themselves feed in order to close and perpetuate the vicious cycle.

Prayer

We pray for all people in this city who live in a permanent state of fear and anxiety.

Comfort those who mourn the loss of a loved one who was the victim of violent crime.

Comfort those who mourn the loss of freedom and innocence, and the loss of what little security they had.

Comfort those whose faith in a loving God has been tested and even destroyed through their suffering.

Strengthen the powerless and convict the powerful.

Bless us with extreme discomfort so that we may do the things which we thought cannot be done, to work towards a just society where police are deployed fairly across the city, and where no one is forced to seek protection.

Amen.