



**ZCBC PASTORAL LETTER ON THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY OF ZIMBABWE'S
INDEPENDENCE**

2 April 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ and all people of good will, we greet you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Congratulations upon the 40th anniversary of our country's independence.

1.0 Introduction

Exhorting the Corinthians to be vigilant during the intermediary period between the time of Christ's coming and his return, St Paul says "... *now is the real time of favour, now the day of salvation is here.*" (2Cor 6:2). For St Paul, this time is a time for conversion, an opportune time for change. Zimbabwe celebrates the 40th anniversary of its independence on 18 April 2020, only six days after Easter Sunday, when we commemorate the resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the triumph of life over death, goodness over evil. For the children of Zimbabwe this is a moment of recognizing the opportunity offered to us by God. It demands that we look back to where we are coming from, acknowledge our gains, sins and pains, reflect on where we are today and looking into the future, initiate processes that will lead us to the dream that God has and the dream that we have for our country Zimbabwe.

2.0 The *Kairos* moment of number 40

In the Bible, the journey of God and His people is symbolically captured in the number 40. This number is mentioned directly or by implication at least 140 times in the entire Bible. The number 40 specially describes this loving journey of God with His people and of the people of Israel back to their God. In Genesis 7v12, the number 40 represents the journey to safety of the family of Noah through their obedience and also the languishing of the rest who did not obey. The number 40 has great spiritual and theological meaning as it is a period of rebuilding, rediscovery which at times came through destruction as in the time of floods.

In the Pentateuch again we meet Moses encountering the glory of God and receiving the Will of God in a letter known as the Decalogue in the 40 days on Mount Sinai. The number 40 also is symbolic of the journey to Israelites freedom as they journeyed for 40 years in the desert to the Promised Land. The number 40 represents the time long enough to discover solace in the Lord as Elijah did for 40 days in prayer. 40 for the Israelites symbolically represents a time to learn and rediscover God our Loving Creator.

40 also marks the reign of God through His emissaries as we see in the reign of the judges such as; Deborah, Barak, Eli and Gideon. It is also a time of advent as in the instance of Samson, making God's reign present through overcoming the Palestinians who for 40 years had been a menace to the children of God, Israel.

Therefore 40 is more than a number in the journey and life of Israel. It is a period of grace, a time of restoration, a time of fortification and a time of peace as is seen in the leaderships of Saul, David and Solomon for 40 years. It also marks a reprieve as seen in David reclaiming honour for Israel and Yahweh after Goliath's 40 days of gloating and ridicule of God and His chosen nation.

The climax and meaning of the number 40 for Israel was realised in the life of Jesus. For 40 days he was in the desert in prayer and fasting and after his resurrection he ministered for 40 days before ascending to the Father. Thus 40 is graduated to mean a time of God's presence through obedience, it is also a time of obedience to the Father, which affirms our identity to overcoming temptations. Thus the meaning of 40 is bigger and broader but above all it signifies a time not numerical but rich in grace as an opportunity of repentance, growth and glory. Every Christian and human being in the journey of Israel which is captured by the number 40; finds reason to reflect, reform and repent.

3.0 Reflections on the past 40 years

Zimbabwe as a nation was born out of the hunger for freedom from oppression, racism, inequality, violation of basic human rights and dignity, poverty and hunger. The independence came out of a protracted armed struggle. Independence created high hopes and expectations for a just, peaceful and prosperous Zimbabwe. The first decade or so of the independent Zimbabwe, witnessed progress on the economic, education and health sectors with special attention given to those who were marginalized under colonial rule.

As we celebrate our forty years of Independence, we acknowledge that we have made some achievements but also some things went wrong along the way. We need to acknowledge the dark chapter in our national memory, which led to the killing of many civilians in Matabeleland and parts of Midlands soon after independence. We have missed so many opportunities that God has given us. We missed the opportunity soon after independence to redefine and seek a different political path from what colonialism had chartered for us. We missed the opportunity of national healing processes based on the policy of reconciliation.

4.0 Our current situation

On a brighter note, in 2013, we adopted the current constitution which if fully adhered to, can promote the rights and freedoms of the people of Zimbabwe. There are concerns on the attempts to amend the constitution which has not yet been fully implemented. The Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 2) Bill if passed by Parliament will make a number of wide-ranging amendments to the constitution, yet a lot of laws have not been aligned with the constitution. We appeal to our government to ensure that all the laws are aligned with the constitution and constitutionalism becomes the lifeblood of the governance architecture.

There is hunger for reconciliation and addressing the past hurts and injustices. For instance the establishment of the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC) gives hope to promote healing and reconciliation in our nation. However, the NPRC is still to be fully operationalised and the duration of its mandate remains unclear, apart from other grey areas, which is leading to loss of confidence in the Commission. There are nevertheless several other efforts of promoting dialogue within and among ourselves and with the international community which are being undertaken in the country. Dialogue is good for our well being, now and in the future.

Zimbabwe has generally experienced a gradual economic recession that has led to closing down of industries and companies, foreign investor flight, job losses, and the decline in agricultural productivity, leading to escalation in poverty levels. Due to the state of the formal economy, many Zimbabweans are working in the informal economy. A look at our health and education institutions shows a gradual and steep decline from where we started. In the last 40 years, we failed to cultivate non-partisan State structures. We have also failed to develop a political culture of tolerance. There are so many issues that need to be addressed like corruption, international isolation, collapsing infrastructure and emigration. The greatest asset of any nation is its people and we keep losing our people for various reasons.

Now with the current COVID-19 there is need for outright and vigorous efforts to fight and prevent this pandemic, which if it is not carefully handled in our country, may spell doom to the whole of our nation where hospital structures are not fully-equipped and ready to combat it. Our only line of defence is prevention. Let us be proactive and work hard to save lives. We welcome the three weeks lockdown declared by Government. This must be complemented by other efforts as we move forward in building good relationships among ourselves and with the international community and developing our country. There will be other challenges in future that can only be overcome through national cohesion and a state of preparedness.

5.0 Our future as a nation

The journey from Egypt to the promised land could have taken two weeks, but instead the people of Israel spent 40 years in the desert, years of wandering as they journeyed towards the Promised Land that God had given them. The days must have been intense, hot and dry. However, one fact stood out, they were never alone even though sometimes they felt so. God met them where they were and they had to rely on him throughout. "By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light..." (Exodus 13:21). We are not alone in our journey to the "Promised Land". We can do ourselves a favour and shorten the journey with more political will and turn the potential that Zimbabwe has into reality. Now is the favourable time for restoring our nation through rebuilding good social, health, education, economic and political structures. We need to repent from bad governance, corruption and violence among other things.

We call for the equitable use of all natural resources, which are God given gifts, for the benefit of the whole country. As a God-fearing people, we need to make sure God has a special place in everything we do. "Obey all the laws that I am teaching you, and you will live and occupy the land which the Lord, the God of your ancestors, is giving you" (Deuteronomy 4:1). We have been moving away from God bit by bit, trusting in our own powers and worshipping individuals. Restoration and Prosperity for our nation will only come from listening to the voice of God.

6.0 Conclusion

Ten years from now, we will celebrate the golden Jubilee of our Independence. May these ten years be a period of re-aligning everything to the original vision of our independence. Fortunately, the golden Jubilee will coincide with the government's vision 2030. Let us try to make the Golden Jubilee a special occasion for everyone. We need to look at our young people and ask ourselves if we are doing something to make sure that their dreams will come true.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, as we celebrate the 40th anniversary of Zimbabwe's independence on 18 April 2020, may the Peace and Hope of the Risen Lord be with you always. Wishing you a fruitful lent and Happy Easter. Once again, Congratulations Zimbabwe, upon the 40th anniversary of independence.

PRAYER FOR OUR COUNTRY

God Our Father,

You have given all peoples one common origin,
And your will is to gather them as one family in yourself.

Give compassion to our leaders,

Integrity to all citizens,

And repentance to us all.

Fill our hearts with your love and the desire

To ensure justice for all our brothers and sisters

By sharing equitably the good things you give us.

May we uphold the dignity of every human being.

Bring an end to all our divisions.

Help us create a human society

Built on love, lasting prosperity and peace for all

We ask this through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen.

Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory be to the Father ...

- +Robert C. Ndlovu, Archbishop of Harare (ZCBC President)**
- +Alex Thomas, Archbishop of Bulawayo (ZCBC Vice President)**
- +Paul Horan, Bishop of Mutare (ZCBC Secretary/Treasurer)**
- +Michael Dixon Bhasera, Bishop of Masvingo & Apostolic Administrator of Gweru**
- +Albert Serrano, Bishop of Hwange**
- +Rudolf Nyandoro, Bishop of Gokwe**
- +Raymond Mupandasekwa, Bishop of Chinhoyi**