

Nelson Mandela

This last Wednesday, 18th July, was the centenary of the birth of Nelson Mandela. The day was marked by a number of events in South Africa and elsewhere.

In Johannesburg former US President Barack Obama delivered a speech about Nelson Mandela's legacy of tolerance. In London a service was held in Westminster Abbey attended by Nelson Mandela's grand-daughter at which a memorial stone was dedicated. Also in London the Duke and Duchess of Sussex attended the launch of an exhibition celebrating the life of the former South African President.

Nelson Mandela is certainly one of the great icons of the twentieth century and beyond. He combined passion and dignity in his fight against Apartheid. His vision was to make the world a better place. He certainly inspired many to pursue that goal, though, as we know all too well, much remains to be done.

Nelson Mandela very much devoted his life to the service of humanity: as a human rights lawyer, as a prisoner of conscience, as an international peacemaker and as the first democratically elected president of a free South Africa.

The 18th of July is marked each year as Mandela Day and the Nelson Mandela Foundation is dedicating this year's Mandela Day to Action Against Poverty, honouring his leadership and devotion to fighting poverty and promoting social justice for all.

There are many memorable quotes from this great man who displayed in his life not only leadership but also humility and an overriding concern for the rights and lives of others. Which is why those words of our Lord in our reading today, the Beatitudes, are particularly appropriate (Matthew 5.1-12),

His words on poverty are especially apt for this year's focus: "Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity, it is an act of justice." "As long as poverty, injustice and gross inequality persist in our world, none of us can truly rest." "For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others." "There can be no greater gift than that of giving one's time and energy to helping others without expecting anything in return."

And a message of hope that still rings true for us today: "Action without vision is only passing time, vision without action is merely day dreaming, but vision with action can change the world." "We can change the world and make it a better place. It is in your hands to make a difference."

Kingsley G. Boulton
20th July 2018