

A visit to Egypt shows how Ubuntu can function

Eddie Daniels

I have just returned from a Bishops and Spouses Orientation programme in Cairo sponsored by the Council of Anglican Provinces in Africa (CAPA).

During our time in the land of the Pharaohs there was an opportunity to visit what is known as the Zabbaleen (garbage collectors) village, also referred to as garbage city.

It is a community comprising both Christians and Muslims who essentially do the garbage collection and recycling for the entire city.

On the face of it, this does not seem out of the ordinary. Consider this: there are over 30 million people who live in Cairo. Additionally, there are over 12 million cars! Can you imagine the refuse that is generated in the city?

At the heart of this community is the St. Simon Monastery, also known as the Cave Church, which is nestled in the Mokattam Mountain in south-eastern Cairo. It has a capacity of approximately 20 000.

It stands as a bulwark against the demeaning of the inhabitants of the area. It affirms the creation ordinance that every person is made in the image of God.

We experienced poverty amongst the residents, but they went unabated about their business of recycling.

It was a lesson in making a living.

A striking feature of Egyptian society is the sense of a single community. This was manifested in the way in which they welcome refugees in their midst. There was no sense of "us" and "them", and I noted the warm heart of the Egyptian people towards the foreigner.

How I long for this to be a feature of our common life as South Africans – ubuntu in action!

Why is it that some are comfortable with "others" and yet, on our continent, there is a lingering intolerance of people seen as unwelcomed guests?

Egypt provided refuge to Jesus and his parents when they faced persecution.

Is this not the least that we can do for our sisters and brothers who seek refuge in our beloved South Africa? In Mathew's Gospel 25:35 Jesus says, "...for I was hungry, and you gave me food, I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me..."

So, here is the thing; as we approach our upcoming municipal elections on the 1st of November 2021, let us carefully and prayerfully consider where we will put our mark in seeking to foster a single metro with a common purpose to dignify each and every resident.

Perhaps a few pointers could guide our prayerful consideration for the candidate to whom we will lend our vote.

Firstly, does the candidate/party exercise a preferential option for the poor?

Secondly, is consideration given to the greatest good for the electorate placed before party political interests when it comes to the utilisation of resources that improves our common life together?

Thirdly, does being the "public servant" take precedence over personal expediency?

Fourthly, is the candidate I'm voting for open to being accountable?

Lastly, can I trust the party or the individual I am lending my vote to for the next five years?

Egyptian society operates largely on a culture of honour. By this I mean one's word is your honour.

Close to the place I stayed was a corner kiosk selling cooldrinks, potato chips, water, and a few additional luxuries.

I owed the owner of the kiosk one Egyptian pound which is roughly the equivalent of one South African rand. When I went back the next day to settle my debt, he simply waved his hand and mentioned in Arabic that it was ok.

I pray you will exercise your right to vote and that you would encourage your immediate circle of family and friends to do the same. Our Metro needs you!

PS Each time I was asked where I was from and said, "South Africa", then the response without exception was, "Oh! Bafana Bafana!"

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