

Refuse to be silent about things that matter.

Martin Luther King Jr once said, “our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter”.

The majority of us have decided to be silent about things that matter.

Vandalism is destroying our country while we watch in silence. Some may argue that they are not silent, but then why are their voices not heard?

Prophet Isaiah in chapter 43:8 wrote, “lead out the people, blind though they have eyes, deaf though they have ears”.

Maybe someone who is supposed to listen to us has ears but can’t hear.

The biggest challenge we face is that vandalism has become a norm in our country.

The majority of our people are silent even when they see this criminality of vandalism.

Our society is guilty of promoting vandalism with its silence.

The law enforcement agencies are guilty of promoting vandalism by not responding to cases of vandalism that are reported to them.

The government gives us the impression that we are a failed state. Its silence and failure to take a stand on vandalism portrays it as the biggest promotor of vandalism.

Meanwhile, vandalism is destroying our infrastructure.

Those that are involved in this act stop at nothing.

They behave as if they want to bring this country to its knees.

Government, business and private property owners are facing serious vandalism.

What is interesting with this phenomenon of vandalism in South Africa is that your house or property is vandalised while you are staying in it.

Public property is vandalised during the day while we are watching.

Our country is being vandalised while we are folding our arms.

What is this vandalism that is destroying our country?

The origin of the word “vandalism” comes from the Germanic Vandal tribe, which sacked Rome in AD 455.

These were blood thirsty warriors who attacked cities and towns, causing destruction and also looting.

Based on the origin or history of the word, vandalism can be interpreted as a social phenomenon that leads to destruction of public facilities and equipment.

The phenomenon of vandalism is complex. It is not motivated by only one reason. What we should understand is that vandalism is not a senseless damage of property, but has an objective. Let us reflect on some of the following reasons:

- It can be directed in conveying a message
- To express frustration
- To pay revenge
- To make money

Most of us will be acquainted with the above reasons.

Whenever we have protests in our communities, we invariably experience extreme vandalism.

Our community leaders don’t condemn this practice and it has become a norm.

We can conclude that vandalism in some cases is a learnt behaviour. The youth of our country is socialised in this bad behaviour.

After the July 2021 unrests we heard our politicians claiming that things were made worse by the level of poverty in our country.

Maybe there is truth in what they are saying, but that claim should not end there.

What we should understand is that most poor people are not criminals. They are dignified, decent, proud people.

Statistically, approximately 55.5 per cent of the South African population is living in poverty (earning less than R992 a month). Of these, 25 per cent or over 13 million, are experiencing food poverty, according to World Bank statistics.

If poverty was the driving factor of vandalism, then this country would have been destroyed a long time ago.

The poverty of our people must not be used to justify wrongdoing.

We must not allow the situation where poor people are abused and insulted to justify certain actions.

Who are the losers and winners on the phenomenon of vandalism?

There are no winners, and all of us are losers.

The biggest losers of all are the poor people of our country.

If things continue at the pace that we are experiencing now, then very soon we will not have schools, decent homes, functional hospitals, water, electricity, rail, and road infrastructure.

These are basic living rights which we are being deprived of by the senseless vandalism.

If it continues, investors will leave the shores of South Africa.

Then we will experience poverty like we have never experienced before.

Pope Francis in his letter "Called to Build the Human Family", cited a proverb from the far East, "a wise person, looking at the egg can see an eagle; looking at the seed he glimpses a great tree; looking at the sinner he glimpses a saint.

"That is how God looks at us: in each of us, he sees a certain potential, at times it is not known to ourselves, and throughout our lives he works tirelessly so that we can place this potential at the service of the common good".

Let the words of Pope Francis remind us that we have the responsibility to work for the common good.

Our silence has normalised the abnormal. Let us make noise in every corner of our country and condemn these barbaric acts of vandalism.

- The South African government must give leadership in the fight against vandalism. It must initiate educational programs that will enlighten the nation on the dangers of vandalism.
- Families must help in condemning vandalism and introduce their children to a society that is anti- vandalism
- Community leaders and civil movement should find an alternative way of expressing their grievances. Vandalism cannot help us in solving our problems.
- Religious leaders must preach against this evil of vandalism. They must also set programmes that will help the people to care for creation and our country.
- Law enforcement agencies must be seen in the forefront of this fight against vandalism.

Silence will not save our country.

But if we make a loud cry together, we can save our country.

Let us wake up from the silence and make ourselves heard before it is too late.

Father Ludwe Jayiya, priest in charge Mater Dei Catholic Parish.