

## Dean's Letter, 3 November 2019

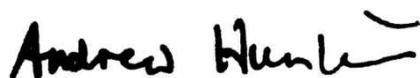
Dear Cathedral family, Brothers and Sisters in Christ

The month of November is a time of remembering. Today we celebrate All Saints' Day; this evening we mark All Souls' Day (the Commemoration of the Faithful Departed); next Sunday (10th November) is Remembrance Sunday, with the big parade on Church Square, and our service of Choral Evensong next week will have that as a particular focus. There has been something of a social media storm around the artwork of a Grade 12 pupil at Grantleigh School, KZN. Some of you may have seen the video, or followed the discussion on Facebook. There were four documents or posts that stood out for me: the initial video by the Richards Bay pastor, accusing the pupil and the school of desecrating the Bible and the Christian faith; a subsequent piece of writing by another local pastor, giving more insight; a response by the pupil, explaining what he was doing in the artwork; and a very good piece by Fr Matthew Charlesworth SJ (a Catholic priest), reflecting on the some of the issues that have been raised.

What the artist was trying to do, we are told, is to demonstrate "organised religion's preoccupation with making money and its exploitation of those with blind faith". The art work contains a series of pictures and animals, with pages of the Bible torn up to provide a surround. I found it to be in poor taste, and quite disturbing. And the social media commentary has become an opportunity for people to attack the church, and to attack the Christian faith, arguing that freedom of speech gives the artist the right to do what has been done. There has been an outpouring of anger and even hatred towards Christianity, from some quarters. It has been quite frightening, to read the vitriol and abuse. Atheists and agnostics had a field day. At the same time, we have to take stock and reflect. Some art is meant to stir up, to provoke, to challenge, to question. We may remember the furore around "The Spear", the painting of former president Jacob Zuma, or the cartoons mocking the prophet Mohammed, and the outrage and violent reaction that evoked in France. People do react very strongly when matters are close to the bone, or when something sacred is attacked. Should we react in the same way? Or is the artist giving a message that we need to hear? Is it true that organised religion is preoccupied with making money? Are the faithful being exploited? Remember the grass eating and doom spraying episodes...

Last Sunday (as well as being our Patronal Festival) was Bible Sunday. We give thanks for the gift of the Bible, the Holy Scriptures. Let's read it, savour it, ponder it, treasure it. Its words point us to find eternal life. Through these pages, we draw closer to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. What a gift we have received. Let's treasure it, and not abuse or ignore it.

My love to you all

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew Hunter". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.