Today I have the mammoth task of speaking to you about love, mercy and money. I hope to do justice to all three.

The readings have a number of characters and it might be helpful for us to group them so that we can derive some spiritual meaning from the readings. We will have them divided into two groups; the Sour bunch and the enchanted ones. The sour bunch is made up of the Pharisees, the Scribes and the older son. These are the people who like to see others condemned and labelled. Modern day language would probably call them the toxic people. These people want to have nothing to do with those who have made mistakes, who have made bad choices. They want to have nothing to do with sinners.

The other group, the enchanted ones, is made up of Moses, he prays for the people who have sinned. He intercedes for them. This group is made up of people like St Paul in the second reading. He thinks that Christ came to call sinners. There are people in this group like the man who is bothered by losing one sheep out of ninety nine, those who go out to look for the lost. The lady who loses her coin and puts on the light to find it- she belongs to the enchanted ones. The father of the two sons. He is prepared to go outside to find both his sons. He is full of love and mercy.

Notice how both sons are met outside and brought into the feast. The enchanted ones want to include others, but more importantly, they want to share with them in the banquet. Jesus likes the enchanted ones. He likes those who turn on the light to find a brother or a sister in need. He likes those who go out of their way for others. There is a choice for us. We can be with the sour bunch or with the enchanted ones. Choose wisely.

Now, the other topic. The money…
As you know I represent 60 000 Catholics of a diocese far away from here. The diocese of Queenstown, South Africa. Queenstown only became a diocese in 1952. Members of the Catholic Apostolate, also known as the Pallottines, The Jesuits, the Dominicans, and The Trappists who later became members of the Congregation of Marianhill Missionaries all worked very hard to evangelise the people of my diocese.
These missionaries built us schools, churches and healthcare facilities. It was the Pallotines who made the greatest contribution. They managed to do what they did because some people in Europe, mainly in Germany believed in their work and supported it. The benefactors sent money and buildings were erected, children were educated and the sick were cared for. I am one of those who were assisted by the church in order for me to go to school.

In those days, South Africa was under the dark spell of Apartheid. It was the Catholic Church that turned on the light and empowered many young people, fighting for their bright future. Today, South Africa is a democratic country. However, the country is under a new spell, that of a corrupt leadership. Leadership that is self-enriching and cheating its people of the resources and development they deserve.

There are still illiterate people in South Africa. There are millions of homeless people. If you googled the most unequal country in the world, South Africa will come up. Thanks to both governments!

The diocese of Queenstown is geographically situated in the rural part of South Africa, far from the urban centers or big cities. This has a negative impact on the lives of the people in my diocese. Youths are always waiting for an opportunity to go to the big cities, there they stand a better chance of getting higher education, a job and better livelihood. Churches in our diocese are mainly populated by very young people and the elderly. Young people who work in the big cities deem it safer to leave their children with grandparents in rural areas. Children still have safer upbringing in the rural areas in smaller towns than in the big cities. The elderly grandparents also do need some companionship and these grandchildren do provide it.

My diocese, as you may already understand, does not have a lot of people who can contribute meaningfully to the funds we need. Some of the missionaries, on top of building churches for us had the foresight of investing in some properties that are now generating some income for us. We are grateful to them. We do get some subsidy from Rome and very few of our parish communities do manage to raise some money to cover their operational costs.

By and large, the chancery has to look after most buildings in the diocese. All insurances, motor, building and healthcare are the burden of the chancery. Some communities cannot even afford to pay the priest, let alone buy him a car. All operational costs are still the burden of the diocesan office.
On top of that, we still reach out in feeding the poor. In recent years we even reached out and provided housing for some homeless people through our CARITS office. We have unfortunately had to close a school in one of our mission areas called Keilands. Our diocese was not managing to pay teachers and to maintain the school, it was the only school in that village. We had to close it down.

Some priests come and ask the chancery for assistance when they discover hungry people in their parish, sometimes they would like us to help send a child to school and lately we have had to turn them away. Some churches have been closed down because we cannot afford to maintain them.

All these and other needs make the work of the church challenging. I am here to ask you to help us. Please support the work of my diocese. Help us to keep the light of hope burning. In some cases your support will go as far as igniting the fire because some situations are completely dark. When you give to my diocese in the second collection today and online, know that your help is much appreciated and you will be making a meaningful contribution in the work of the church of Queenstown.