

## **DEPUTY PRINCIPAL'S MESSAGE ASSEMBLY 14 FEBRUARY 2020**

I wonder what you think about St Valentine's Day. Personally, I have never liked it. This probably is a hangover from the trauma of not getting a single valentine's day card or rose in my life – not one – ever. Still, I am happily married and I love being married and, although I know it is not for everyone, I do highly recommend it.

On March 10 1957, Nelson Mandela asked Winnie Madikizela to marry him. She said yes and on 14<sup>th</sup> June 1958 they were married in Bizana, where she had been born in 1936. She was 22. It was very tough for them from even before the start and although there were some joyful moments, including the birth of Zenani the following year, they knew very little marital peace and joy as they were hounded by the state security apparatus as their struggle against apartheid continued.

On the 11 June 1964, Mr Mandela was convicted of sabotage. He was sentenced to life imprisonment the next day and on the following day he arrived on Robben Island. He and Winnie would be separated for nearly 27 years.

27 years! I cannot imagine the loss and pain they both experienced and so I will not try and put it into words. I just know that when I think about it my heart aches at the thought, knowing how much I love my own wife and children. 27 years.....

On 11 February 1990, Mr Mandela was released. It was an amazing day and the whole world watched. Perhaps the most iconic pictures of the day were the ones of him with his wife at his side. A wonderful sight – a man free at last and a husband and wife united after so long.

Sadly though, their marriage did not survive all the life-changing traumas they had experienced, and they were finally divorced in March 1996. Another tragedy amongst the multitude suffered by those who stood up to the state in those dark days. A further price paid that we might live in a free country.

So in this week as we remember Mr Mandela's release from prison 30 years ago, let us remember that his sacrifice to enable our democracy cost him not only those years of incarceration on a barren island and separation from the people he dearly loved, including his wife and children. It also, in the end, cost him his marriage. And, as we remember these things, let us be more determined to make his dream for South Africa a reality. Whilst we have racist, homophobic or sexist attitudes or language in our school his dream here just remains that – a dream. You and I make it a reality by how we treat one another, our words and deeds. We also make it a reality through our courage to stand up against what we know is unkind or unjust or just plain unacceptable.

Today is St Valentine's day so I want to end on a hopeful and happier note.....

Romantic love is an extraordinary human experience. So much so that it dominates the lyrics of most songs and the story lines of many movies. Most humans yearn for it or enjoy the blessings it has brought into their lives.

So, even in his old age, romantic love found Mr Mandela again and in 1998, on his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, Mr Mandela married Graca Machel and she was a wonderful companion to him for the final years of his life.

This is a happy ending to his life-story. But let us not forget that most of his life was a sacrificial fight against injustice and so may each of us in turn care enough to build his dream into a reality here at Bishops and in our communities beyond.