

**PILGRIMAGE GUIDE  
TO SOME IMPORTANT SITES  
ASSOCIATED WITH  
THE LIFE AND MARTYRDOM OF  
BLESSED TSHIMANGADZO SAMUEL  
BENEDICT DASWA**



**Beatified 13 September 2015**

**Returning to Thohoyandou, we pray:**

**PRAYER OF SAINT FRANCIS**

(Which Benedict liked to pray with the whole Church during the time of 'the struggle')

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace;  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
Where there is injury, pardon;  
Where there is error, truth;  
Where there is doubt, faith;  
Where there is despair, hope;  
Where there is darkness, light;  
And where there is sadness, joy.  
O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek  
To be consoled as to console;  
To be understood as to understand;  
To be loved as to love.  
For it is in giving that we receive;  
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;  
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.*

**BLESSED TSHIMANGADZO SAMUEL BENEDICT DASWA,**

**PRAY FOR US!**

**+ + +**

*So we made the outside friendship then. As a good person, he was a friend of mine also. We used to visit each other regularly. I happened to know his home place. As we were both working far away from our homes, we used to visit each other on the weekends. We did not have means of transport. So, that is where I met his parents and he met my parents also. Although I was with him for only one year that we had been teaching together our relationship continued, **from 1972 until to the time when he passed away.***

*We were working together for one year in the same school. After that I was appointed to **Shayandima** where I used to stay to teach there from **1973**, but our friendship continued up to the last time he passed away.*

*In soccer, he used to train the team. He was the team manager of our school. And also in hockey, after having been trained at **VECO** (Venda Training College), he used to train other local teachers. He was in charge of training other local teachers in hockey. But later on, because of his talents he was again elected to train local teachers in workshops, so that other teachers may know this sport, because it was a new sport. I attended those workshops.*

*When he was with the group of teachers, you could see **the leadership skills** that he had by controlling those people, by giving the methods that he had and people following it easily. You could easily see that that person really knows the work that he was doing.*

*He was the kind of a person when he delivered us his speech people could listen to him and also they could appreciate what he was saying to them”.*

## **PILGRIMAGE / VISIT - SATURDAY 30 JANUARY 2016 TEXT TO BE USED BY THE GUIDES**

**DEPARTURE from THOHOYANDOU: 9:00 a.m.**

**We start with a time of Prayer:**

Sign of the Cross, Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be...  
Blessed Benedict Daswa, pray for us!

Along the trip, the guide gives information about Blessed Tshimangadzo Samuel Benedict Daswa (Bakali) who was a Christian in the world, a prophet and a courageous witness of Faith..

Blessed T. S. Benedict Daswa was born on **16 June 1946** and died as a Martyr **on 2 February 1990**.

**We remember what Jesus said in Luke 12: 8-9:**

*“I tell you, if anyone openly declares himself for me in the presence of human beings, the Son of Man will declare himself for him in the presence of God’s angels. But anyone who disowns me in the presence of human beings will be disowned in the presence of God’s angels”.*

Blessed TS.Benedict Daswa was born into the Bakali clan of the Lemba tribe in Mbahe, a tiny village on June 16 1946. His traditional name, Tshimangadzo, means ‘surprise, miracle or wonder’. Back then it was known as a Homeland (reserve) under tribal authorities, situated within the Northern Transvaal of the Union of South Africa. This was a very different world from the one in which he would be slaughtered 44 years later. By then the Venda Homeland was known as the Republic of Venda, independent from South Africa on 13 September 1979 (Benedict Daswa was Beatified on a 13<sup>th</sup> September!).

From birth, Daswa’s life was beleaguered with coincidences – his birthday would later become Youth Day – a memorial day remembering the student uprising in Soweto in 1976. And on 2nd February, 1990, the same day that the former Nationalist Party Leader, F.W. de Klerk, announced the legalization of all political parties as well as the release of all political prisoners, including Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela († 2013), Daswa was ambushed and brutally stoned and beaten to death.

Benedict's father also gave him the biblical name, Samuel. He was the first of five children born to Thidziambi Ida (Gundula) and the late Tshililo Petrus Daswa. After Benedict three brothers and a sister were born: Thanyani Mulimisi Mackson, 18 June 1948; Muvhulawa Calson, 25 February 1950; Thinavhuyo Mavis, 18 April 1956; the late Humbulani Innocent 17th September 1959.

As first born son, Benedict had a certain role in accordance with the expectations that one day in his father's absence or death, he would be head of the household. His parents were hardworking, enterprising, ordinary people in the village, neither destitute nor wealthy. Tshililo Petrus Daswa kept cattle and worked in his own garden. Though he did not have a profession, he had skills in building and was a good wood sculptor. Thidziambi Ida, Daswa's mother, also worked in the fields, but as the children grew older, she started a small business, brewing traditional beer. This money funded the children's schooling.

The family practised traditional Lemba rituals. Benedict would have grown up in a culture where values such as, respect for elders, taboos of certain foods, traditional etiquette, circumcision rites and "talking" to ancestors were normal practices.

Great importance was placed on living in harmony with the surrounding spirits and natural world. Diseases, sickness and misfortunes were attributed to evil spirits and the jealousy of people. Therefore, when problems such as trouble, accidents, disaster or adversity arose, the belief was that these occurrences were caused by someone. It was believed that certain individuals in the community had special powers and the ability to influence events and other people, and that they were able to rise above natural phenomena.

Benedict Daswa spent his entire life in the Republic of South Africa, in the Catholic Diocese of Tzaneen, in the current Vhembe district.

**1. As we pass near William Eadie Hospital in Tshidimbini village:** We remember this where Benedict attended the Salvation Army Primary School in 1962.

Benedict's early years were spent in Mbahe village in a family renowned for their hospitality and kindness. Keeping with the tradition, Benedict became a herd-boy prior to going to school. In 1957 Daswa started his primary education at Vondwe Primary School.

The Diocese of Tzaneen plans to develop this area as a Pilgrimage Centre in the coming years. Naturally, as the cause progresses, the demands will increase. This will be especially true of developing the Pilgrimage site and Shrine in honour of Blessed Benedict Daswa. As the costs are huge, much will depend on the success of seeking and receiving generous donations locally and within the Southern Africa Catholic Bishop Conference Region. So, let us not forget to contribute to the monthly R5 for R5 collection in our parish!

We can walk until the erected stone, a reminder of the celebration of the Beatification which happened on the site on 13<sup>th</sup> September 2015. Then we can pray the 8<sup>th</sup> day of the Novena Prayer.

#### **10. We will go from Tshitani to Tshififi by the Road D 3657 to reach the Punda Maria Road – Road 524**

Then, we will pass near Tshilivho Primary School at Ha-Dumasi village where T.S. Benedict Daswa was first appointed a teacher.

One of his friends, who taught with him in the first Primary School of Tshilivho as an assistant teacher, testifies the following:

*"It is sometimes difficult to relate everything. Actually, I met **Samuel** for the first time in **1972**, when we were teaching together at **Tshilivho Primary School**. As teachers we met for the first time; we used to know each other and became friends, very close friends. More especially I was interested in extra mural activities at school, at which he also was very good: it was athletics, more especially soccer, and thereafter volleyball, which was introduced; it was a new game to us, it was introduced and then he was the one who was in charge of this volleyball.*

*As a teacher at **Tshilivho**, he was a person who likes a lot to have what we call a team. He wanted staff members to work as a team. Team work helped us to solve problems. The time I knew him, when we were together, though we were both assistant teachers, I have never heard him quarrelling to the headmaster. He did not have clashes with the authorities; there is not even a single day that I knew that he was called in the circuit office to be reprimanded of something of the sort. The relationship thereof was very good.*

Fr. Tim O'Neill, MSC, Superior in Louis Trichardt, in the meantime decided that, because of the uncertainty of the time and limited funds available, a "drive-in" church would be built.

Eventually, **in 1959**, a Church site was granted at Tshitani. A great sense of achievement prevailed. It was the first church site granted in Venda. But with the forced removals of people at that time, there was a lot of uncertainty as to what the future might hold; and the church had to be built on the site, within a specified time, otherwise it would revert back to the tribe. The building of the Church **commenced in 1961** and was completed the following year. (Cf. Fr. Michael Crowley, MSC.5) It was an oblong shaped room about fourteen feet long and five feet wide, with huge double doors with just enough room for the priest and the altar. Right next to it was a huge fig tree that provided shade and shelter for the worshipping community. It is here where Benedict Daswa first worshipped.

Some years ago, the Headman of Tshitani Village gave a portion of five hectares to the Catholic Church. Two years later another portion of five hectares was added. The PTO for the first five hectares was given by the Thulamela Municipality. We are looking to get the title deed of the 10-hectare plot before building any permanent building.

On 1 November 2014, Bishop Joao Noé Rodrigues, Bishop-Emeritus Hugh Patrick Slattery msc, priests of the Diocese of Tzaneen, some priests from the Dioceses of Polokwane and Witbank, and nearly a thousand parishioners gathered at Tshitani Village in the Parish of Thohoyandou for the Eucharistic Celebration on the Solemnity of All Saints. Also present at this celebration were Heads of the Local Tribal and Municipal Authorities together with their Entourages, the Daswa Family members including Benedict's mother, siblings, adult children and other extended family members, and representatives from other Christian Churches. During the Mass Bishop Joao solemnly blessed a 10-hectare plot of land acquired by the diocese for the future Shrine and Pilgrimage Centre in honour of Blessed Benedict Daswa. At the place where the future church is to be built, Bishop Joao buried twelve miraculous medals of the Mother of God, symbolizing the Church built on the foundation of the twelve Apostles. Two trees were planted, one by Bishop Joao representing the Church, the other by Her Worship Cllr Mahosi NG representing the Civil Authorities, to mark this historic occasion. A number of speeches were also given by various dignitaries, both before and after the Eucharistic Celebration.

Benedict's uncle, Ralson Ramudzuli Matshili, was the principal at Mbahe Primary School and soon Benedict moved in with his uncle. Matshili had a great influence on Benedict Daswa becoming a Catholic, having attended St Scholastica's Primary School. Matshili was not married and he took Daswa in to help him out with the household chores. A friend remembers that Daswa initially had many questions regarding the Catholic Church, but Matshili's patience paid off and soon Daswa converted.

From 1958 to 1961 Daswa attended Mbahe Primary School and completed Standard Two. During this time he also started catechism classes and preparation for Baptism. In 1962, he continued his Senior Primary Education at Tshikonelo Primary School at the village of Tshikonelo village (Ha-Matshika) and later at the Salvation Army's Mission School William Eadie in Tshidimbini village.

## **2. When we arrive at MALAVUWE, before leaving the tarred road and turning right in the direction of NWELI:**

This is the village where the late Benedict Shadrack Risimati stayed, a Shangaan teacher who had become a Catholic while training to become a teacher at Pax College, an institution in the Diocese of Pietersburg (now called Polokwane). Benedict Risimati was the first Catholic presence in the eastern Sibasa area.

Benedict Risimati, a role model living his Christian faith, helped to stimulate the growth of the Church in Sibasa from which the young Benedict Daswa came.

Some of Daswa's friends, belonged to the Shangaan tribe; and some of them were Catholics. In the neighbouring village of Tshififi, at a place called Tshitani, was the first Catholic community that gathered for Holy Mass under a big tree near a "drive-in" church.

Benedict Risimati had a very strong influence on Benedict Daswa's Christian and Catholic formation. His catechumens had intensive catechism classes and they were trained beautifully.

As part of the instruction for baptism he used the example of the great Saints of the Church. At the retreat preached before his baptism, Daswa chose the name of Saint Benedict as he was influenced by the life of his catechist Benedict Risimati and as Saint Benedict was a prayerful monk whose motto was "*Ora et Labora*" (Pray and Work). Benedict Daswa tried to implement this motto throughout his life.

At the age of 17, on 21 April 1963, while still at primary school, and after two years of instruction, Tshimangadzo Daswa was baptized by Father Augustine O'Brien, MSC, at Malavuwe village (at Ha-Mafenya) in Sibasa Parish, taking the name, Benedict. His sponsor was Benedict Risimati, his catechist. Benedict received the first Holy Communion on the day of his baptism. He was confirmed three months later, on 21 July 1963 in Sibasa. Post-baptismal instruction continued for another year. During this time Benedict was still staying at home. His parents allowed him to follow his own convictions and he attended Sunday Mass or Sunday Service at Malavuwe village (at Muramba sub-village).

At the age of 23, in 1969, Daswa began his teachers' training at Tshisimani Teachers' Training College. It was during his time there that he met the Parish Priest, the late Father Patrick O'Connor, MSC, who became his friend and spiritual guide.

Benedict passed the Primary Teacher's Certificate in 1970. His first appointment as a teacher was at the Tshilivho Primary School at Ha-Dumasi village. During this time, he also studied for his Matriculation Certificate by correspondence. In 1977, Benedict was appointed Principal at Nweli Primary School, the post he held until his death.

**When we arrive at NWELI, we visit the Church and Primary School:**

### **3. NWELI CHURCH:**

The building of the Church at Nweli began in 1982. The Church of Our Lady of the Assumption of Mary was blessed on **14 August 1984** in the time of Fathers Dan Eiffe MSC and James Stubbs MSC, Parish Priests of Sibasa/Thohoyandou. All the stones that you see beautifying the building were transported from the Mutshundudi River by the pick-up/bakkie of Benedict Daswa with the help of all the members of the Catholic community.

Here we remember how the building of this church was so dear to the heart of Benedict Daswa. His wife, Evelyne Shadi Monyai, testified before her death, that Benedict, her husband, told her they could not build their house before building the house of the Lord.

Two young men then dragged Benedict Daswa outside. Benedict hugged one of them and pleaded: "Please, spare my life!" The young man hugged Benedict back and said: "Ok - let go of me now. We won't kill you". Benedict believed the young man. One among the mob carrying a knobkerrie approached Benedict and wanted to hit him and the mob stopped him. Then Benedict realized that there was no escape as he was surrounded. Benedict then started praying out loudly: "God, into your hands I commend my Spirit" (Cf. Psalm 31:6).

Things happened fast after that. One of the members of the mob said, "Listen to him, he is dying –still he prays to his God". Unsuspecting the man with the knobkerrie hit Benedict on the head, which crushed Benedict's skull. Benedict collapsed. Boiling water was then poured over his head, ears, nostrils and injuries.

Benedict moral stand against witchcraft cost him his life the night of 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1990. He was brutally killed: stoned and bludgeoned to death. He paid the ultimate price of being a Christian. He was just four months short of his 44th birthday.

**8. When we arrive at Mbahe, after the soccer field, the bus will park along the road before the sign-post "Mbahe Home Base care sponsored by the National Lottery". Marshals will indicate to the Bus driver when he can climb up and leave the Pilgrims to get out of the bus and walk to the house built by Benedict Daswa. The Daswa family will welcome them. (No interviews)**

### **9. When we arrive at TSHITANINI SITE:**

**Some historical notes:**

**Early in 1956**, Fr. Jerry McCarthy, MSC, went to the Department of African Affairs and applied for a site to build a church close to Sibasa. He was assisted by Benedict Risimati's brother, Joe, who was a policeman and knew everything that was going on in the area. Although he was not a Catholic, he was very proud of his son Patrick's work as a child catechist. He had knowledge of the happenings inside of the African Affairs Office and kept them informed about the application, which literally was going nowhere as the Native Commissioner dumped it in the waste paper basket and allegedly said: 'The Catholics are not welcome here'. Yet Fr. McCarthy persisted and often called on the Commissioner showing him kindness and gentle determination.

The same day, the former Prime Minister of South Africa, Frederick W de Klerk, announced the release of Nelson Mandela who had spent 27 years in prison. The following Sunday, 18 February 1990, Chris Mphahuli and Convince Makwarela went to Benedict's house to hand to Eveline Daswa the *malilo* (condolences) of R135.00, collected from the parishioners of Nweli district. Some months later, Eveline gave birth to Ndifhedzo Benedicta Daswa, their last-born.

Each year on the Sunday nearest to the day on which the feast of All Saints is celebrated, the Catholic community of Nweli District continued to pray at Benedict's grave.

His mother, Thidziambi Ida Daswa, who had saved money from her monthly pension, had a tombstone erected on 26 November 2000. on the feast of Christ the King, the tombstone was unveiled at a special ceremony in Mbahe graveyard with the attendance of the Catholic Parish of Sibasa.

**Pilgrims visit the previous grave and then come back to the Bus parked along the road side.**

**7. When we arrive at the place of the ambush, before the soccer field in front of the bamboo trees where there is the sign-post "Mbahe Educare Centre":**

Some of the people were allegedly hiding on both sides of the road in the bushes. A dry trunk of a fig tree was dragged across the road to block all traffic. Then stones were put around the trunk to anchor it. It is further alleged that they armed themselves with stones and knobkerries. Benedict saw that the road was blocked by stones and a tree trunk and he blew his horn, in order for people to come and help him. But instead, the young members of the mob started stoning him from both sides of the road.

Benedict got out of his car, but he was immediately pelted with large stones. He ran for cover across the soccer-field. The mob chased him and he ran towards some traditional houses. But there was nowhere he could hide. He tried to get refuge at a shebeen where mahafhe (traditional beer) was sold. He was told to leave immediately. By now, Benedict was already shocked and injured.

Benedict then ran into a rondavel kitchen of a woman's traditional house as the door was open. He tried to hide inside. However, the Comrades arrived and asked the woman where Benedict was. They added that they would kill her if she did not reveal Benedict's whereabouts. The woman pointed to where Benedict was hiding, pleading: "Don't kill me, he is inside."

Benedict always attended the Sunday liturgical celebration together with his wife and children and his mother Ida. One of his daughters remembers that Sundays were respected days, whether it was raining or cold, even if the car was broken down, it did not matter: "We would walk every Sunday and arrive on time".

**On Sunday 28 January 1990**, the last Sunday before his death, one of the members of Nweli's Catholic Community, said he saw Benedict coming to Church and arriving earlier than usual. He was alone, opened his Bible and was reading it silently for a very long time before the Sunday service. He greeted him, together with other people, but then continued reading his Bible.

The Scripture readings of that Sunday were the texts of the third Sunday of Ordinary Time of Year A (in the Catholic Liturgical Year). We may understand that those Scripture's readings may have given him the strength to stand for his faith. How not to pick up in the first reading from the book of Isaiah (9:1) and from Mathew's gospel (4:16) that following verse:

**"The people that walked in darkness has seen a great light; on those who live in a land of deep shadow, (or, in the land of shadow, dark as death) a light has shone."**

We cannot help but link the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, 2 February, with the day of Benedict's death? The introduction to this feast in the Sunday Missal says:

**"On that Feast we celebrate the close of the Christmas festival of light. Candles are blessed and we carry them in procession to welcome Christ, the light to enlighten the Gentiles and the glory of his people."**

In his time of trial, the Responsorial Psalm 27 (26), after the first Reading may have been like a balm to Benedict's soul:

**"The Lord is my light and my help;  
Whom shall I fear?  
The Lord is the stronghold of my life;  
Before whom shall I shrink?"**

**The mortal remains of Tshimangadzo Samuel Benedict Daswa (relics) were brought and interred in this church on Monday 24 August 2015.**

Personal prayers or requests can be written and placed in the prayer box near the mausoleum. Before leaving the church we can pray the official **Prayer to Implore Favours** through the intercession of Blessed Tshimangadzo Samuel Benedict Daswa.

*Blessed Trinity, you filled the heart of Blessed Benedict with great love and zeal in building up your kingdom. You chose him and gave him the courage and the strength to stand up for his faith without fear and bear witness unto death. Loving God, like him, may I always proclaim the truth of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ by the witness of my life. Keep me away from all deeds of darkness. Protect me from evil spirits and all the powers of evil. Make me a true Apostle of Life in my family and in society. Father, through his intercession, and according to your will, grant me the grace that I ask of you... I draw strength and courage from the life of Blessed Benedict whom we venerate as an intercessor and model of holiness. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

***Blessed Benedict Daswa, pray for us!***

#### **4. NWEI PRIMARY SCHOOL:**

In 1977, Benedict was appointed Principal at Nweli Primary School, the post he held until his death. The Primary School that he found was a temporary shelter in wood. We visit the current school with the garden and the mango trees.

We learn more of Benedict Daswa as a teacher and the Principal of the Nweli Primary School through his log books, his Instruction Manuals and his Triplicate Books. From 12th January 1977 Benedict was the Principal at the small Nweli Primary School until his untimely death on 2nd February 1990. Some of his colleagues testified that Benedict spent more time at school, than in his own village. The school was like his family. Benedict's records were kept pristinely. He recorded and organised everything with precision. As principal, he was the first to arrive at school and always the last to leave. He stuck to the Education Department's instructions as to running his school.

**5. On arriving at TSHAMUTILIKWA Village (at Ha-Nkavhele) next to Tshamutilikwa Bottle Store we stop. This is the spot where the bag of mealie meal and his owner were dropped:**

Benedict then drove the young man to his house near Nweli village. The man would later testify: *"When we arrived at my place, I offloaded the bag of mealie meal and carried it inside. When I walked out again, I realised that Benedict had yet not left. I asked him if something was wrong, but instead he got out and walked to the back of the bakkie to see if something was wrong. He tried several times to start the bakkie, but it refused. Then he jokingly said to me, 'What have you done to my bakkie, are you a witch?' The bakkie later started up and Benedict left".*

**6. When we arrive before THUSALUSHAKA Secondary School, we get out of the Bus and walk on the right side path until we arrive at the cemetery of Mbahe at Tshamasera where Benedict was originally buried.** (*Tshamasera* means, "the place where we can cross the river, where there is a ford through Mutshundudi River).

**The exhumation of the mortal remains of T S Benedict Daswa was carried out on Monday 24 August 2015, then carried in procession from Mbahe Village Cemetery to the Church of Our Lady of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary in Nweli Village.**

**Before entering the graveyard, the guide can read the following:**

Benedict Daswa died a victim of a witch-hunt on 2 February 1990. His Christian funeral was held on Saturday 10 February 1990. The procession began at his home at Mbahe and proceeded to the Catholic Church in Nweli, dedicated to Our Lady of the Assumption, the Patroness of South Africa for his Requiem Mass. Afterwards everybody proceeded to the graveyard at Mbahe Village.

Father John Finn recalls: *"The grave was very simple. The family put a twig on the coffin, which is a part of the Lemba culture. The idea of putting a twig and water in the grave was to assist the person to the other world. They symbolize the breath and water necessary for the afterlife".*

At the cemetery, the family members conducted their Lemba rituals, and sang the Lemba funeral song, "*Ndinde*". The priest performed the burial rite and burned incense. It was a quick ceremony, as it was not a normal death. Even at the unveiling of the tombstone, a prayer was said by only one member of the Daswa family.