

‘The trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised’

Raymond Perrier

The long-awaited beginning of the 2010 FIFA World Cup today has been met with enthusiasm and joy by many South Africans. Raymond Perrier describes the celebrations that have already taken place to welcome the tournament and asks: where do we find God in this celebration of 2010?

For the trumpet will sound,
and the dead will be raised
imperishable, and we will be
changed. (1 Cor 15:52)

The noise of *vuvuzelas* over the last few days in Johannesburg may not have actually woken the dead but the World Cup does seem to have awoken a once-deadened spirit of optimism in this frustrating yet wonderful city. I went to see a film this week called *Unhinged: Surviving Jo'burg*. Yes, it argues, you can survive this city and you grow through the experience. But you have to be slightly unhinged to do so.

Well, from the exuberance and celebration on every corner it seems that most inhabitants of this city are not just unhinged but positively swinging off the door frames. And what a life-affirming sight it is!

Many Mass-goers in Johannesburg this coming Sunday will be clad in the vibrant yellow and green of *Bafana, Bafana*, the national football team. This is not some change in the liturgical calendar; but instead an invitation by the bishops to celebrate Soccer Sunday. And whether the national team win, lose or draw on the opening day of the tournament, the city will be celebrating the fact that for the next four weeks they are the centre of the known universe.



It may be easy to dismiss all this as an attempt by dull Church people to leap on the trendy bandwagon. But I would ask you not to dismiss so quickly. Celebration is key to our lives as people, and as people of God. Our Mass is a celebration. Our baptisms and weddings are celebrations. As Christians, even our funerals are celebrations.

The Ignatian tradition challenges us to ‘see God in all things’. So where do we find God in this celebration of 2010? Despite the corporate sponsors and the politics and the FIFA control freakery, God is in South Africa. And dressed in yellow and green!

South Africa celebrated in 1994 at the birth of our new nation, witnessed like all miracle births with awe and wonder by an unbelieving world. The country celebrated again in 1995 as Mandela wore the Springbok shirt and South Africa won the Rugby World Cup. But maybe that was a bit like a Baptism celebration – slightly staged, a bit constructed. We could all see what was happening but perhaps not everyone felt it.

But now in 2010 the adolescent South Africa is celebrating its coming of age. This is Confirmation and *Dvija* and *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* all rolled into one.

And the celebration is spontaneous. And it is infectious!

You cannot tell a teenager how and when to celebrate. All you can do is give them permission and leave them to get on with it. The World Cup has given South Africa permission and, under God's benign smile, we are making full use of it. And if a teenage celebration involves a lot of noise and mess and hang-overs and a few things being damaged....well, that is teenagers for you!

Of course, after the party we will have to face the reality of our new responsibilities as a mature member of the family of nations. And we might continue to make some mistakes. And will hopefully learn from those mistakes. But in the meantime, the trumpets are sounding. And they are calling us to party!

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