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MISSION MESSAGE

Grandma's Attic Reveals Spiritual Treasure Trove

*By Shannon Kowalski
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After my grandmother passed away in May, my aunt and I were tasked with sorting through her belongings. I approached the task with a mix of sorrow and curiosity, expecting to find old family photos and perhaps a few relics from a bygone era. What I did not anticipate was uncovering a treasure trove of letters that would deeply move me and reshape my understanding of my family's spiritual heritage.

A bundle of well-preserved letters bearing colorful stamps and postmarks from Leribe and Maseru, South Africa, was tucked away in a dusty box in the corner of my grandparents' attic. The handwriting on the envelopes was elegant and formal, addressed to my late grandfather and showed the return address of Archbishop

Emmanuel Mabathoana, O.M.I. As I carefully opened the first letter, I was struck by the warmth and respect in the Archbishop's words. He addressed my grandfather as a dear friend and a brother in Christ. It seems that a friendship was struck between them in 1958 after the Archbishop made a missionary appeal for his home diocese of Leribe at Saint Mary's Church in Plymouth. My grandfather and Archbishop Mabathoana exchanged dozens of letters from June 1958 to November 1969.

The letters chronicled Archbishop Mabathoana's efforts to establish schools, clinics, and churches in the remote villages of Leribe and Basutoland, bringing education, healthcare, and the sacraments to long-neglected communities and a relatively young diocese. Archbishop Mabathoana spoke of his challenges — disease, poverty, and the tensions of a society on the brink of change. Yet, despite these difficulties, his words were filled with gratitude and trust in God's providence. He wrote about the power of prayer and the importance of remaining steadfast in their mission.

As I continued reading, I realized that these letters were not just historical documents but a spiritual legacy. Through them, I could see the hand of God at work in my family's history, guiding my grandfather in his vocation and deepening his relationship with the Church. I felt a profound connection to my grandfather, who passed away when I was young, and a renewed sense of purpose in my own life. I pray that I can honor my grandfather's memory and legacy of supporting missionary work in South Africa and worldwide through my role with the Pontifical Mission Societies.

Finding those letters in my grandparents' attic was a gift I never expected. They reminded me that our lives are part of a larger story, one that is woven together by the threads of faith, friendship and service. Archbishop Mabathoana's words to my grandfather were a powerful reminder that even in the face of extraordinary challenges, we are never alone — God's grace is always with us, guiding and sustaining us on our journey.

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