

Catholic Church offers prayers for Mandela

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CAPE TOWN, South Africa -- The Catholic Church in southern Africa is praying for Nelson Mandela, Cardinal Wilfrid Napier said as the 92-year-old anti-apartheid hero returned home after being hospitalized for a respiratory infection.

"Former President Mandela means different things to different people," Cardinal Napier, archbishop of Durban, South Africa, said in a Jan. 28 statement, noting that to his family, Mandela "is a veritable patriarch who stands for and is an example of the virtues of a truly great and loving father, who cares for all near and dear to him."

To South Africans, "he is a great and inspiring leader, a true icon of the ... reconciliation which we still need urgently" and to the international community "he is a unique African and global statesman who rose above personal, tribal, race and party interests in order to lead the South African nation through a difficult transition from apartheid to democracy," he said.

South Africa's first democratically elected president was hospitalized for two days. Hospital officials said the infection was not life threatening and that Mandela remained in good spirits throughout his stay.

Mandela received more than 10,000 messages of good wishes during his hospitalization, including one from U.S. President Barack Obama.

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