

First Reading: Genesis 9:8-15**Second Reading: 1Peter 3:18-22****Gospel: Mark 1:12-15****Theme: God's promise and governance**

In a village called Msanzala, lived a very beautiful girl called Jelita. A lot of men asked for her hand in marriage. She only opened her heart to one tall and handsome man called Ngozi. Ngozi promised Jelita the world she could ever imagine. He told her she was the apple of his eye and the only one his eyes wanted to see and his heart wanted to contain. She believed his promises and even loved him more than herself. With time, Ngozi started becoming less and less present to Jelita. Eventually, word came around that Ngozi had fathered a child with another woman. The news left Jelita devastated. She became depressed. She cared less about what she ate, dressed and how she looked. She no longer considered herself as the once most beautiful girl in the village. She eventually divorced Ngozi and lived for five years alone. During that time, she was not able to love or trust again. She would say to herself, "what is beauty when your heart can be broken like this? What is a promise when it can be broken so easily? People don't keep promises. They only say things to please you and eventually hurt you and leave your heart bleeding and dead. It is better not to believe a promise and stay alive than to believe and be left dead".

Promise

What is a promise when it can be broken so easily? Many of us have been promised. Many of us have made promises. Some of those promises have been fulfilled and others broken. Every promise has the potential of being fulfilled and the risk of being broken. A fulfilled promise gives us life. A broken promise kills our life.

In the first reading, God makes a promise/covenant with Noah, Noah's children and all creation. God promises life to Noah, Noah's children and all creation. God says, "I promise that never again will all living beings be destroyed by a flood; never again will a flood destroy the earth. I will remember my promise to you and to all the animals that a flood will never again destroy all living beings" (Gen 9:11-13; 15).

In the story we have just heard, Jelita eventually found it almost impossible to trust and believe in a promise. How could she trust again after being betrayed? How could she allow her heart to bleed and be left dead? What would preserve her heart from hurt and death? Unlike the story of Jelita, God's promise to Noah is a promise that preserves life. The life that God preserves is God's life in human beings and all creation. First God created us in God's own image. So God's first goal is to ensure that we fill the earth with His glory. However, God's image and glory in us faces some threats. Just like the flood was a threat to Noah's and the animals' life, so is the flood of sin and sinful structures a threat to God's image, glory and our life. God promises never again to let the flood destroy the people. Today too, God

promises never to let the flood of sin destroy us. Hence God's covenant is a covenant of protection. God protects us from animals by allowing us to eat and make use of all created animals for our good. God also protects us from our fellow human beings by not allowing anyone to take another person's life. God's promise is everlasting. When God says "I will remember my promise to you and to all the animals that a flood will never again destroy all living beings" (Gen9:15), it does not mean that God forgets like we forget how our faces look 30seconds after looking at ourselves in the mirror. By remembering God means that God will keep the promise. It is a promise that can be trusted. It is a promise that fills the heart with love. It is a promise that does not leave one's heart bleeding and dead.

CONDITIONAL COVENANT FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE

The covenant God makes with Noah and all his descendants and creation has conditions. It benefits both God and Noah. On the part of the latter, he benefits by being fertile and populating the earth. Since he, Noah, is a good man, it is hoped that his descendants will be good people too. A good mango tree does not produce lemons. Also, all the creatures of the earth will be put under Noah's dominion and power. He has the privilege to use the animals and plants for food, yet with certain conditions.

First, Noah must not eat meat with blood still in it. Second, he must not shed blood of humans. Failure to honour these conditions would result in shed of blood on Noah too. Yet above all, God re-assures Noah about the benefits that come with the covenant. God will not fail on the benefits given to Noah. God's promises show how God plans to govern the people and the rest of creation. God will not destroy the earth by a flood again. As a sign of assurance, God then signs the covenant with Noah by putting a rainbow in the sky and says, "I am putting my bow in the clouds. It will be a sign of my covenant with the world. Whenever I cover the sky with clouds and the rainbow appears, I will remember my promise to you and to all the animals that a flood will never again destroy all living beings. When the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between me and all living beings on earth. That is the sign of the promise which I am making to all living beings" (Gen9:13-17). God's way of governing creation is all inclusive. God does not only concentrate on Noah and his family but also on all living beings on earth.

The gospel today tells us that when Jesus was in the desert being tempted by Satan, God protected him both from Satan and the wild animals. God sent angels to help Jesus. When Jesus begins to preach the Good News from God, He invites the people to turn away from their sins and believe the Good News. This is the message which gets us started in this Lenten season. "The right time has come", Jesus says. The task before us is manageable. We are to do only two things: Turn away from our sins and believe the Good News. No matter how sinful our lives are and have been, Jesus promises us the Good News. No single sin can and will separate us from God's love and promise for us. In Noah's time people sinned and disobeyed God, yet God relented, saved their lives and that of their livestock and offered protection through a covenant made with Noah, his descendants and all creation. In our time, which is flooded with corruption, injustice, sexual and gender based violence, broken promises both from our loved ones and our political leaders, God still desires to protect our lives by remembering His promise to us. As Peter says in today's second reading, through the death of one good man, Christ, we are led to God. We come to God through the one promise made to God in good conscience.

In spite of all failures, God gives us the blessing and duty to fill the earth again. God wants us to fill the earth with life and equality by fighting all practices that promote violence against vulnerable people like children, women, widows, the aged and all those who cannot defend themselves against all kinds of injustices. These people too are made in God's image and God wants their lives to fill the earth with the glory of God.

During this lent, God wants to bless us as He blessed Noah and his children. God wants us to remember that we are made like God (Gen9:6). God makes a covenant with us. It is God's desire that we have life and have it abundantly (Jn10:10).

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND SHARING IN SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

- How can we build trust in our families when promises are not fulfilled?
- God is always faithful to the covenant made with us. During this lent, how can become more faithful to God, ourselves and others?
- What should we do to help our political leaders keep their promises?

COMMUNITY PRAYERS

- Lord, we pray that during this lent we may learn to become more faithful especially to those whom we have promised to love, care for and protect. Lord, hear our prayer! Lord graciously hear us!
- Lord, we pray that our hearts and minds may become more willing and open to leave our sinful habits behind and embrace the Good News from God. Lord hear our prayer! Lord graciously hear us!
- Lord, we pray for our leaders that through their dedication to serving your people, they may be able to fulfill the promises they made during their political campaigns. Lord hear our prayer! Lord graciously hear us.