

First Reading: Isaiah 2:1-5

Second Reading: Romans 13:11-14

Gospel: Matthew 24:37-44

LET US WAKE UP AND STAND READY

Advent is the beginning of the year of worship (Liturgy) of the Christian Community, the Church. The whole year is centred around the meaning of our faith in Christ. So we here in Zambia begin by making ourselves ready to welcome Christ coming among us with great eagerness. We are so eager because we know who Christ is for us. He is the promised Saviour and Liberator of the whole of humanity and the whole of nature that God had so marvellously created through him and for him from the beginning so that we may all participate in the fullness of God's own life and love. But our humanity, which of itself is quite limited, is not able by itself to seek what is truly good and to reject all that is evil. That is how we may drift away from God's love and goodness and in this way remain unable by ourselves both to know God and to share the fullness of his life and love. Still God never gives up on our humanity and our world that he created with so much love and destined us to remain forever in God's love. We really do know that this is true here in Zambia!

Advent indeed celebrates in worship that eagerness with which we want to welcome the Kingdom of Christ among us, in our day-to-day life. What is the Kingdom of Christ? It is the justice, goodness, and love of God that wants to overcome all injustice, all evil and all hatred that seeks to destroy and kill our humanity and all that is good. Why should we in Zambia be so eager to welcome Christ's Kingdom? It is because we are seeking the truth, the way, the light and the power that would enable us never to give up the on-going struggle against self and social deceit, against whatever tends to lead us astray from the true well-being of each person and the community, against all the oppression and all works of hatred and destruction that darken and destroy us and our society.

That is why the prophet Isaiah tells us "Come, let us go to the mountain of the Lord ... that he may teach us his ways so that we may walk in his path... let us walk in the light". That is why Paul tells us also: "Let us give up all the things that we prefer to do under cover of the dark; let us arm ourselves and appear in the light". The armour Paul is talking about is the means by which we may struggle for all that is truly life enhancing, for all that builds up people in order that all may live their full human dignity, personally and socially. That is why Isaiah dreams in sure hope that people "will hammer their swords into ploughshares, their spears into sickles". That happens when we start seeking to overcome our selfishness and thus start doing all we can to heal all kinds of divisions, conflicts and unjust inequalities, in our homes, in our small Christian communities, among all men and women as well as in the religious, cultural, political, and economic spheres of our beloved country of Zambia. What kind of armour do we need in order that we may succeed in this struggle? Paul tells us "Let your armour be the Lord Jesus Christ". Christ's armour is the power of the Spirit of God, the life-giving Spirit of love and wisdom, which he came to endow us with, both personally and socially, so that he may teach us his ways so that we may walk in his path.

That is why God continues to speak to each one of us personally and as a community in our hearts, through the events of our lives and through the basic goodness of creation to which we belong. But above all he speaks through his only Beloved Son Jesus Christ who took to himself our fragile humanity in order to renew it by his loving self-gift to us. This is how he empowers us with his own power, the Holy Spirit, that is, he enables us to struggle on successfully against all expressions of evil and to seek to do what is good in all areas of life. This we do when, like him, we no longer live for ourselves, but instead we start living for others and with others as we learn from him, especially by his own example, to give ourselves in loving service to our brothers and sisters (John 13:15). This is how the history of God's people should always be an on-going dialogue of selfless love that pushes us to constantly keep seeking reconciliation and reunion, justice and peace, in our community as human beings and through it with the God of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Isaiah calls on the People of God to await and yearn for the coming of the promised Saviour. In the season of Advent we prepare ourselves to celebrate the very moment in our history when indeed the Saviour was actually born, to be indeed God-with-us by becoming a human being like us. He came so that the Kingdom of God may be among us in and through him as well as through his proclaiming and bringing about the Good News of Salvation in his words and deeds. Because of this he was rejected and killed for our sake by those of us who chose instead to belong to the kingdom of evil and death. But Jesus conquered evil and death, injustice and oppression, by rising from the dead for our sake that we may do the same. That's why we Christians in Zambia can struggle against the injustice of corruption can work for better wage conditions, can promote gender equality, can make poverty history!

In the Gospel, Jesus points us to the moment when our personal history and the history of the world will come to an end. He tells us to keep watching and struggling to overcome those forces, those cravings in us and in our society that deceitfully drive us to draw away from seeking the good of others by doing the work of peace and justice, of healing and reconciliation, of looking for the common good. "Ukwali nsoke, takwafwile muntu" (warnings prevent avoidable deaths). This means, it pays to heed to people's advice. Instead we keep looking only for our own good at the expense of others by discriminating against them, by dominating and exploiting them, by taking away their human dignity.

During this time of Advent we in Zambia need to examine ourselves about our attitudes towards others, in our families, in our small Christian communities, in our neighbourhood, in our work, in our social choices. We need to pray that we be strong so as to be able to participate as fully as possible in that serious process by which we may be healed by Jesus from those attitudes so that we may joyfully welcome him who was born for us so that we may join him in his Kingdom of justice and peace starting already now. In the words of the Psalmist we shall thus be able to start anew to greet each other sincerely and say "Peace be upon you!" when we start being able to reassure and tell each other in all earnestness, "I seek for your good!"

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND SHARING IN SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

- What is the Kingdom of Christ like, and why should we be so eager to welcome Christ's Kingdom here in Zambia?
- What kind of armour do we need in order that we may succeed in the struggle against the sins of injustice around us?
- How does Jesus help us to keep struggling to overcome the movements in us and around us that keep us from really promoting true peace and justice in our Zambian politics, economics and culture?

SKETCH

Have one person mistreating others (group of four). Another person comes because she or he heard the cry of those oppressed and comes to liberate them. The people celebrate their liberation in joy and everyone is happy in the community.

COMMUNITY PRAYERS

- We pray, Lord, for the Spirit of love and wisdom so that we may, personally and socially, walk in the light of peace and justice. *Lord, hear our prayer! Lord graciously hear us!*
- We pray, Lord, that you open our eyes to see the need to welcome the Kingdom that frees us from the bondage of sin. *Lord, hear our prayer! Lord graciously hear us!*
- We pray, Lord, that you help us to seek the good of others by doing the work of justice and peace in our communities in Zambia. *Lord, hear our prayer! Lord graciously hear us!*