

First Reading: Baruch 5:1-9

Second Reading: Philippians 1:3-6

Gospel: Luke 3:1-6

“PREPARE A WAY FOR THE LORD!”

Advent reminds us of the wonderful promise God made to us, and shows how the promises are fulfilled with the coming of Jesus into the world. It is an excellent time to aim ourselves in the right direction, and to commit ourselves to the right path. Advent is the time when God is coming to do the work of salvation. In order for this work of salvation to be effective in our lives we need to prepare well for it. The prophet Baruch reminds us of what we need to do as a way of preparing for the coming of the Lord. Thus he calls us to ‘flatten mountains’ and ‘fill valleys’. What does this mean concretely in our personal and communal lives? It means that we need to take a good look at our lifestyles, attitudes and relationships. God wants us to live in peace, share with those who have very little, live in fraternal love and practise justice.

In our country today many people are suffering from lack of food, decent medical help, decent education and lack of jobs. The coming of the Messiah promises that those who lack anything will have their needs met. However we can ask ourselves how will this come about?

The readings of today remind us of three things. They speak about:

- What God is about to do?
- What we should do?
- Implication for our lives

The reading from the Letter to Philippians reminds us that God has initiated a process of growth in the spirit and will ensure that it is brought to fulfilment. This beautiful passage further reminds us that the Lord Jesus is still to come.

‘I am quite confident that the One who began a good work in you will go on completing it until the Day of Jesus Christ comes.’

The Gospel of today enjoins us to ‘prepare a way for the Lord...’ The coming of the Lord in our lives will bring with it the ‘salvation of God.’

All three readings then bring hope in our lives. The work of salvation begins when individuals live pure and blameless lives as St Paul encourages us to do in the second reading today. He adds that God has already begun the work of salvation and he will bring it to fulfilment. Consequently, we have a part to play. God wants to use us as instruments of his work of salvation. When we live ‘pure and blameless lives’ we learn to share, work for the promotion of social justice and live in fraternal love. A society that is built on these principles is a society

where there are no poor people, adequate social services such as education and health are provided for all and social structures serve the needs of those who are forgotten. Poor people, particularly those living in rural areas are frequently left out in many national development activities. They lack good roads to transport their produce, markets to sell agricultural yields and schools for their children.

The second thing that the readings of today invite us to, is a conversion of hearts. In the Gospel today, John the Baptist preaches the need for repentance. Repentance is another way of flattening mountains and filling valleys.

In our Zambian context, today we need to repent for our individual transgressions as well as for our communal transgressions. Even though we may not be individually culpable for the sufferings around us, we are as a community guilty of having failed to pay attention to the needs of those around us. God is asking us to look within our hearts and around our community and do what we can to prepare for his coming. The best way to prepare for the coming of the Messiah is for us to live in love with those around us and to extend that love to others that we may not be in regular contact with.

Sometimes in our individual and social lives we wonder whether God is present. We ask questions such as: *Where is God? What has become of his promises?*

The first reading in some ways responds to the above questions. Specifically, it is an invitation to be sorrowful no more. The prophet suggests that the time to grieve is no more. It is time to discard the garments of 'sorrow and distress' and put on the garments of God's glory. The reason to be hopeful is that God's liberation is close at hand. The impending arrival of the Messiah will change our social, political and economic lives so that we all enjoy opportunities to meet all our needs.

'For God has decreed the flattening of each high mountain, of the everlasting hills, the filling of the valleys to make the ground level so that Israel can walk safely in God's glory.'

What are these mountains that impede the happiness of people in our country today? What are the valleys that inhibit us from enjoying a full life? The Second African Synod has reminded us of the need to work for peace, justice and reconciliation. In our communities, to what extent do we strive for a just and harmonious society?

Do our Small Christian Communities, parishes and Catholic Action groups reflect the presence of Christ in our world?

Our communities can only be just when gender violence ceases, when family learn effective ways of communicating and children enjoy better access to those opportunities that would lead to well grounded and equipped citizens to promote justice, peace and reconciliation. However, when the Lord comes our lives will be transformed into happiness and prosperity. The Lord will remove any encumbrances that constrict our joy. It is the Lord working through His spirit who will ensure that we are ready to receive Him when He comes. Our task is to make sure that

when He comes we are ready to receive Him. John the Baptist asks us to prepare the way for the Lord.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND SHARING IN SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

1. What, in our life would prevent us from preparing a 'Way for the Lord' this Advent Season?
2. How are we contributing to our community's preparation to receive the Lord at Christmas?
3. What steps can we take to reconcile ourselves to God and to our community?

SKETCH

Have someone to act as a leader in a Christian Community. He is very dedicated to Church work and is almost always available whenever there is work to do at Church. People at Church refer to him as a "holy man". However, he rarely finds time to be with his family and his wife and children have no say at home. He is the boss and he has all the answers. His family lives in fear and there is no happiness in this family. One day, he comes to his senses and realises that part of Christian living is the promotion of the dignity of everyone. He recognises his mistake and begins to consider the importance of every individual in the family and outside. The family grows closer to God, as individuals find peace and happiness.

COMMUNITY PRAYERS

- Lord, open our eyes to your ways and assist us to see beyond the borders of our vision and to cut through the prejudices that keep us in isolation, *Lord hear our prayer! Lord graciously hear us!*
- Lord, we pray for the grace to proclaim your message willingly and participate in bringing about your reign in our world, *Lord hear our prayer! Lord graciously hear us!*
- Lord, we pray for families struggling to eat, clothe and have access to other basic needs and that our leaders may work towards promoting dignity for them in the policies they make, *Lord hear our prayer, Lord graciously hear us!*

