

First Reading: Zephaniah 3:14-18

Second Reading: Philippians 4:4-7

Gospel: Luke 3:10-18

‘ZION, HAVE NO FEAR!’ “ZAMBIA, HAVE NO FEAR!”

The big day is imminent and the readings of today reflect the joy and expectancy of the people of God. The apostle says: “Always be joyful”. And live in a spirit of prayer and thanksgiving.

The first reading is an exuberant message inviting us to be joyful, to sing and dance. God our liberator leads us in rejoicing and dancing. ‘The Day has come!’

It is time to rejoice, to shout with joy and to jump in ecstasy. There is no reason to be afraid anymore. God is finally in our midst. This King will increase our love for Him and for one another. He is a mighty Lord because he is called ‘Warrior! Saviour.’

God is dancing with you...Dance with shouts of joy!

The second reading continues with the theme of rejoicing. The apostle invites us on more than one occasion to rejoice. This is because ‘The Lord is near.’ There is no need to worry about anything because this God of ours will address all our concerns. What we need to do on our part is to tell him all that irks our souls and disturbs our hearts. The Lord will respond by granting us peace.

In the Gospel we are invited to join the hearers of the message of Good News. They repeatedly ask ‘What must we do?’

The expectancy for the coming of the Lord is growing and the people discover they are not ready yet to receive him. They need to do something in order to prepare themselves to welcome the new King.

What should we do in our own lives to prepare for the coming of the Lord?

At a recent weekend retreat, participants were asked to state their expectations for the weekend. One man was not quite sure why he was at the retreat in the first place. He simply said he came along because his friend had invited him. He was not a practicing Christian, he said, and did not see what impact the gospel teaching had on his life. He nonetheless stated that he would be open to whatever would be proposed during the weekend.

The preacher at the retreat began by presenting illustrations of what happens when people encounter Jesus Christ. He stressed that a real encounter with Jesus is always transformative. When the man heard these words he was quite cynical and approached the preacher and said to him: ‘I have been going to church since I was a boy and nothing has happened to me. Are you suggesting that I have not met Jesus?’

The preacher said to the man; “Do you really want to meet Jesus?” The man replied, ‘I wouldn’t mind.’

Whereupon the preacher proceeded by proposing a series of spiritual exercises. Mid-way through the retreat something happened to the man. The first sign was that he had grown rather quiet and withdrawn. He was no longer talking much and did not even approach the preacher. Towards the end of the second day, the man could not resist approaching the preacher with much agitation. The preacher asked what could possibly be the matter. In response, the man leapt from his chair and embraced the preacher and exclaimed that he had finally met the Lord. The preacher could tell from the change that had come over the man that indeed something had happened to him. It was clear that whatever had happened to the man was a result of the spiritual exercises that had been proposed to him.

This story, reminds us, in a simple way, that whenever the Lord enters our lives something changes within us. The readings of today in some way express the same point. The arrival of the promised Messiah will be a cause for great rejoicing. This is because his entry into our lives will bring about some transformation. This transformation will affect our social, religious, political and even economic dimensions of our existence. In religious terms we will enjoy a closer and deeper fellowship with the Lord.

Socially, the entrance of the Lord in our lives will strengthen the love we have for our brothers and sisters especially those in need. Politically, we will see more just actions and more integrity from our national leaders. And economically, we will see that many more people enjoy better living standards. This is because God wants human beings to live in joy. Christianity as we know is a practical and social religion. The arrival of the Messiah will bring an end to wars, social injustice, and economic exploitation and usher in a time of peace and happiness when we learn to cooperate with him in his work of reconciling the world to himself and to God.

As the important day draws nearer we hear the beating of drums and the ululations of the women. Just as the imminent arrival of important personage raises hopes in the people waiting for that person, so we Christians wait expectantly for the coming of our Lord.

Each one of us needs to ask himself or herself the question: *What must I do to receive the Lord in my life?*

Some people need to stop exploiting others. The rich will share with the poor and the gap between them will be eliminated. Men will accord proper respect to women and minimise any violence that takes place between the genders. National leaders will be more accountable to the electorate and work for them. They will stop misleading the people with empty promises and lies. Each one of us needs to do something to prepare to receive the Lord in our lives.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND SHARING IN SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

1. Do we personally feel our encounter with Jesus influences our life?
2. How different is our life from the person that does not listen to the Word of God everyday?
3. How can we foster our relationship with God everyday?

SKETCH

Have someone to act as man who lost his brother a year ago. He has a wife and two children whom he is able to look after. Six months after his brother's death, he went to the deceased's home and got a car, fridges and grabbed a house which was on rent for the children's education. The youngest child stopped school in Grade 8 since there was no source of income. One day when sharing the Word of God with his Christian community, he recognises the special concern Jesus had for widows and orphans and the many poor people. He was struck by Jesus' treatment of the poor and decided to return the property he had grabbed and the children and their mother were able to meet their basic needs.

COMMUNITY PRAYERS

- Lord, you love justice and are close to the afflicted, assist all women and men in their search for just institutions, *Lord hear our prayer, Lord graciously hear us!*
- Lord, you are the light in our darkness, may we see meaning in our struggles, *Lord hear our prayer, Lord graciously hear us!*
- Lord, give us the grace to help us allow our brothers and sisters the opportunity to live in your freedom and love, *Lord hear our prayer, Lord graciously hear us!*

