

First Reading: Micah 5:1-4

Second Reading: Hebrew 10:5-10

Gospel: Luke 1:39-45

PROMISES OF HAPPINESS, LIBERATION AND SECURITY

Today's readings convey to us promises of happiness, liberation and security. At last, the Messiah is here and he brings with him the great news that we are liberated from the forces of evil that bring darkness in our lives.

In the first reading, the prophet Micah promises us a 'future ruler of Israel'. This King will take care of his people in the manner a shepherd tends his flock. He commands the power of Yahweh and carries the majestic name of God. He will bring security in our lives because he will represent his God, our God.

The Letter to the Hebrews announces that what the King prophesied in the first reading has arrived. He has to do the will of the one who sent him. The will of God is that we should lead happy, loving, holy and secure lives.

In the Gospel, the Good News that has been announced engenders joys in all of us including unborn babies. This is because finally the promises that were made a long time ago are about to be fulfilled. God chooses human instruments to carry out his purpose of liberating his people. We too join in the rejoicing of the people of God because finally God lives amongst us.

What does the coming of the Lord mean for us in Zambia today?

Since 2003, our country has been looking forward to the enactment of a new Constitution. This document which governs the life of the nation is supposed to ensure that all the citizens of the country enjoy a full life by enjoying economic, cultural, political and social rights that ensure that their needs and aspirations are met. These rights include education, health and employment and shelter. Currently, not every school going child can access education opportunities right up to the tertiary level.

Many Zambians today do not enjoy easy access to health services. Amongst the youths, unemployment levels remain high while many of our brothers and sisters do live in good houses. In the absence of such a good Constitution many of our people will continue to live unfulfilled lives and will miss the opportunity to develop individually in an integral way. This will definitely impact negatively on the development of the nation.

It is not surprising then that many citizens of this peaceful and potentially wealthy nation look towards the enacting of a Constitution that meet their aspirations but would also stand the test of time. It will be very unfortunate if the people of our country would be denied such a good Constitution. We, Christians should advocate for a new Constitution with a new Bill of Rights.

The people of Israel were at one time expecting the beginning of a life of freedom, peace and prosperity. They expected that such a time would be inaugurated by the arrival of the promised Messiah. The time of corrupt judges, priests and prophets would come to an end once the Messiah had arrived. This was at a time when social, political, economic and cultural situation of the time was disastrous. The arrival of the Messiah would bring to an end the era of selfish leaders who were only interested in lining up their pockets at the expense of serving people.

The coming of the Messiah will usher in the reign of a just ruler. However, when the time came most of the Jews missed the promised Messiah. Instead of a mighty and majestic king, the promised Messiah arrived in a quiet manner and the people barely noticed him. He hailed from Bethlehem an insignificant municipality. The only people that truly embraced him were the small people such as shepherds. Such people included Mary the mother of Jesus who is considered the first and most perfect apostle.

In today's Gospel, the meeting of Mary and her cousin provokes joy in the Zachariah household. Wherever Mary goes she brings joy because she has become an instrument of salvation. This comes out of Mary's faith and trust in God. Mary is teaching us that it is worthwhile to place our trust in the word of the Lord, always. She trusted even when initially it looked impossible that God will fulfil his promises to the people of Israel. Mary represents those people that are not normally noticed. However, God works through them. Such are the 'blessed' as opposed to the rich, famous and important people. The message of Advent is for us to remain hopeful that the Messiah will bring about a future of justice and hope.

The inauguration of a good and durable Constitution is one way we can prepare for the reign of God. Therefore, let us all re-dedicate ourselves to the effort of ensuring that just structures of a political, economic, social and cultural nature are in place to ensure that conditions for allowing the reign of God will become more of a practical reality here in Zambia. Like Mary in the Gospel, we too have a role to play in ensuring that many more people live secure and joyful lives.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND SHARING IN CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

1. Mary was and is the instrument of Joy in people's lives. In what way are we a source of joy for many?
2. Do we have trust in God even when things do not just seem to work as we expect them to?
3. Which situations in Zambia leave us feeling helpless and make us lose hope for change and what can we do to make a difference?

SKETCH

Have someone to act as a woman who sees that in her Church there is discrimination based on tribe. This shows itself in the way leaders are chosen at Church; people tend choose those from their particular ethnic grouping. She is uncomfortable with this situation but she believes nobody would like to do anything about it. She tries to bring this topic for discussion at her Christian Community and everybody thinks it is something that can never be. She almost gives up but through her prayers, she realised that few other people began to pay attention to this issue and

many came to consider it very important. These discussions led to sensitivity to this issue and leaders were now chosen on merit.

COMMUNITY PRAYERS

- Lord, you invite us to trust in your saving mercy, help us to be confident of your continuous love for us, especially in times of doubt and distress, *Lord hear our prayer, Lord graciously hear us!*
- Lord, fill us with the joy you bring at Christmas and give us the grace to share it with others through our kindness and generosity, *Lord hear our prayer, Lord graciously hear us!*

Lord, you became human and were born in a troubled land: come and liberate all peoples suffering oppression, *Lord hear our prayer, Lord hear graciously*

