

**First Reading: Gen 22, 1-2. 9. 10-13. 15-18**

**Second Reading: Rom 8, 31-34, 18-22**

**Gospel: Mk 9, 2-10**

### **Social Transformation- relevant and credible Church**

Recently I met a friend that I had not seen for many years. The last time I had met him he was looking very sad, very discouraged, very thin. When we talked he told me honestly that he had been tested positive for HIV and now his family had rejected him, putting him out of his house. I indeed felt sorry for him.

But this time when I met him, he looked much better. He had a smile on his face and more weight on his body. He told me that he was receiving ARV medication, his family had welcomed him back without any fear of stigma, and he was holding a good job. I was amazed at the transformation in his life. His inner goodness and lovely personality were showing forth in a wonderful way!

Have you ever experienced meeting someone like that? Well, I thought of my meeting with my friend when I reflected on the Gospel of Mark for this Second Sunday of Lent. It is the beautiful story of the transformation that Jesus experienced in what we call the *Transfiguration*. We know that Jesus was truly human and his family and disciples saw him as an ordinary human being like themselves. But on this special occasion, the fact that he was also truly divine shined forth in a powerful fashion.

Indeed, Mark tells us that his whole person was changed and even his clothes were “dazzling” – a really beautiful transfiguration of Jesus was shown to his disciples. His divinity shined forth and his majesty overwhelmed Peter and James and John! It was a special scene that they would always remember.

I wonder if this story can tell us something about our Church here in Zambia? You and I experience the Church – the community of believers – in many different ways. Sometimes the Church is wonderful and the services are impressive, drawing us closer to God and helping us experience Jesus as Saviour and the Holy Spirit as consoler. But sometimes the Church might be a bit unfriendly, the church leaders not so helpful, the church liturgies dull and the homilies boring (hopefully not this homily!) Sometimes we might even wish we belonged to some other church – or to no church at all!

Do I exaggerate? Or isn't this really our experience? And don't we truly want our Church in Zambia to be transformed, transfigured? Well, I think that this is the task and the mission of the Second African Synod that we spoke about last Sunday. When our bishops gather in Rome this coming October, they are going to be working to make us truly a *community in service of reconciliation, justice and peace*. (Remember, these are the signs of the Kingdom of God that we prayed about last Sunday!)

To be a Church that is really transformed and transfigured in order to show forth its inner beauty and power, our Christian communities here in Zambia will have to ask ourselves two questions: What must we do to be *relevant*? And what must we do to be *credible*? These challenging questions were raised in the midst of discussions during the First African Synod, held in Rome in 1994.

To be *relevant* means to be truly touching the lives of the people around in a real and significant fashion. It means to relate to every day issues like harmony in families, troubles with children, problems of drinking and drugs, difficulties with employment, setbacks because of HIV and AIDS, etc. But a relevant Church isn't just a social agency, another department of the Government's Ministry of

Social Development. No, a relevant Church will relate to these challenging issues by strengthening the faith of all of us and by helping us understand that this faith must be shown in deeds. And sometimes these deeds will be political action to get the Government to respond more to the problems!

To be *credible* means to be really believable and trustworthy. This means that the Church must be seen to practice what it preaches! This is especially a challenge for church leaders. Listen to what the Synod's preparatory document says about the genuine concern a Bishop must show in facing up to injustices in our society: the Bishop must be able "to denounce the abuses of the powers-that-be as well as the manipulation of people by some politicians, and vigourously defend the 'little people' who watch helplessly as their rights are trampled underfoot" (Lineamenta #54).

Surely there are other examples you might think of when considering what it means to be a Church that is relevant and credible. It really encourages me to think about these questions because I can see that our answers – and the answers that the Second African Synod will come up with – will help our Church in Zambia to be transformed, to be transfigured.

### **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND SHARING IN SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES**

- What are the biggest changes for the better that you have experienced in your life and in the life of our Church?
- Do you think that what our Church preaches and does is relevant to the everyday lives of ordinary Zambians? Why or why not?
- What do you think would make our Church more credible to everyone?

### **SKETCH**

Have a person preaching in a very excited fashion, waving hands around and pointing to heaven again and again. When another person comes up and asks for some food, have the preacher just wave hands even more, pointing up to heaven and dismissing the hungry person. The hungry person walks away sad.

### **COMMUNITY PRAYERS**

- We pray, Lord, that we may always seek to transform our inner spirit as individual Christians and as Church so that people will recognise you in our midst. *Lord, hear our prayer! Lord graciously hear us!*
- We pray, Lord, for grace of always being aware of and responsive to the needs of others around us. *Lord, hear our prayer! Lord graciously hear us!*
- We pray, Lord, for our Zambian Bishops who will be attending the Second African Synod. *Lord, hear our prayer! Lord graciously hear us!*