

First Reading: Genesis 15:5-12, 17-18

Second Reading: Philippians 3:17-4:1

Gospel: Luke 9:28-36

TRUSTING IN GOD

Last Sunday we reflected on the temptations of Jesus in the desert during the forty days that he spent preparing for his ministry. We learned that Jesus overcame his temptations by putting his trust in the Word of God. Jesus was so “anchored and rooted” in the life of his Father that the attraction to possess things, to be important or to have power were not strong enough to move him away from God. Jesus was teaching us that even a sinless person like himself is at risk to temptations. However, temptations can be overcome by placing our confidence in God, by our total and utter dependence on God.

This Sunday we have another example of a man who placed all his confidence in God. In the first reading we hear that Abram was an old man when God asked him to leave his homeland and to emigrate to a land he did not know. God promised Abram children even though Abram himself thought he had passed the age when one could have children. But the Old Testament reading tells us that “Abram put his faith in God and this was reckoned to him as uprightness.”

Once again we are reminded that depending on God will bring us the fulfilment we seek in life. We cannot achieve true peace and success by relying solely on our own resources, capacities and wisdom. We need God in our lives. That’s a powerful message for us this Lent and throughout the whole year.

In the second reading today, St. Paul warns us against focussing too much on earthly things. We shouldn’t think only of riches and pleasures and good looks and fortune and fame. Such things are truly transitory, easily passing away, and do not bring the kind of joy that really lasts. Consequently, we need to imitate people like Abram whose sole purpose in life was to find out what God wanted him to do and then to try his best to do just that. Indeed, we can only live upright and satisfying lives by focussing on what God wants us to do rather than on what we want to do.

In the Gospel today, Jesus shows us how we can learn to do what God wants. He is seen praying on the mountain where he is transfigured. What does it mean to say that Jesus was “transfigured”? It means that his true character showed forth in a marvellous way, as the disciples Peter, James and John saw a glimpse of the glory of his divinity. It was an event that so impressed these disciples that they would remember it for the rest of their lives!

We Christians here in Zambia can be “transfigured” when we learn to pray all the time. Why is that? Because through our prayer our lives will change and we will enjoy a deeper and closer relationship with God. We don’t have to be superstars in prayer, some sort of fancy “mystics.” No, we simply need to turn our lives over to God by offering him our day each morning, listening to his instructions each day, and thanking him for that day each evening.

Here in Zambia some people believe they can enjoy a good life by focussing only on amassing wealth and wielding power. Such people are only concerned about earthly things and have no time to pray, no time to listen to God and to follow his instructions. Even we Christians can be pulled into a very phony life that is only concerned with gratifying our earthly desires at the expense of obedience to God. Then we just live on the surface of things and our family and friends recognise how shallow we are, how immature and undeveloped in realistic human ways that reflect our true character as daughters and sons of God.

Zambia's declaration as a "Christian nation" and a continued debate on this has made some people think that this will bring all sorts of blessings upon our beloved country. But some of these people do not want to be truly faithful in following God's commandments. This is not a true covenant. A true covenant is one that makes us instruments of God's saving power. A true covenant is an agreement to cooperate with God in achieving his purposes here on earth. That's why the New Covenant is what Jesus was working for, the Kingdom of God.

Those who cooperate with God and allow themselves to be true instruments of God are concerned about issues of reconciliation, justice and peace. Do you remember those three words? "Reconciliation, justice and peace" – this was the theme of the Second African Synod that met in Rome during the month of October last year. The Bishops of Africa – including four Bishops from Zambia – met for three weeks to study and discuss and pray and make resolutions and recommendations about this theme. They wanted to learn how our Church in Africa can serve the people in helping to meet the many needs – spiritual and material, personal and social – that the people have today.

Our own Zambian bishops have encouraged all of us to find ways of putting this theme of reconciliation, justice and peace into the practical lives of our families, our neighbourhoods, our small Christian communities, our parishes, our schools and work places and businesses, our national politics.

For example, some of the consequences of this theme that were lifted up during the Second African Synod were a strong commitment to peace and harmony among peoples; a deep concern for the vulnerable members of our society such as the majority poor in Zambia; a promotion of the rights and dignity and opportunities for women in church and society; an endorsement of political leaders who serve the people first and not themselves or their families or their tribes; and a practical respect for the environment, for God's great gifts of nature all around us.

If we are like Abram, trusting only in God, and like Jesus, transfigured in his closeness to his Father, then we as individuals and communities can do great things here in Zambia these days!

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND SHARING IN SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

1. Do we often feel that trusting solely on our own resources, capacities and wisdom is what will bring the fulfilment we seek in life?
2. What lessons have we learnt of trusting in our own power and wisdom and in totally depending in God?
3. What ways do we use as individuals and community to find out what God wants in our lives, to find out his will for us?
4. What are some of the ways, we find useful, of putting the theme of reconciliation, justice and peace into the practical lives of ourselves and community?

COMMUNITY PRAYERS

- Lord, help us to have a strong commitment to peace and harmony with others and to have a deep concern for the most vulnerable in our society, *Lord hear our prayer! Lord graciously hear us!*
- Lord, help us to see that earthly things and pleasures are not important but our trusting totally in the love of God, *Lord hear our prayer! Lord graciously hear us!*
- Lord, help us to make meaningful and personal the implications of the Second African Synod by making reconciliation, justice and peace central to our Christian lives, *Lord hear our prayer! Lord graciously hear us!*

