

**First Reading: Joshua 5:9. 10-12**

**Second Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:17-21**

**Gospel: Luke 15:1-3. 11-32**

## **CHOOSING LEADERS**

Sometimes people make promises but don't keep them. "I'll pay you back your loan next week," they say. But next week turns into next month and next month turns into next year and then all is forgotten! "Let's meet in town centre at noon," says a friend, "and I'll treat you to lunch." But she never shows up and never apologises.

Yes, to make a promise and not to keep it, is all too common. That's why it's so good to know that when God makes promises, God always keeps them! We learn in today's first reading that God has finally brought to fulfilment what he promised Moses. He has indeed brought his people out of the land of captivity and oppression in Egypt. He has vindicated his people and taken their shame away. This has all been accomplished as he promised, through his support of Moses' successor, the great leader Joshua.

In the second reading, St. Paul reminds us that God is at work reconciling us to himself. It is all God's good work. God has transformed us from our old selfish selves into new creatures. The old corrupt self is no longer visible and in its place is a brand new creature. Even though we may have turned away from God through our own sinfulness, God does not forget or abandon us. He is waiting for us to return to Him.

But it is in the Gospel that we really get the most beautiful message of God's loving forgiveness with the wonderful story of the Merciful Father and His Two Sons. Jesus chooses to be with us at table not because we deserve the honour. No, he stays with us in spite of our wickedness and wilful transgressions. He actively goes out of his way to look for us until he finds us and prepares a feast for us. In the story that Jesus tells we learn how the father's relationship to the wayward son shows that God is always patient with us. God abhors sins but is patient with the sinner.

God desires us to enjoy a kind of fellowship that is common between those who share meals. Jesus shows this to us by the way that he goes out of his way to share the company of outcasts and nobodies, tax collectors and sinners. This should serve as encouragement to many of us who feel that God cannot love us because of our sinfulness. But God is a generous lover and he pours out his love on us even when we choose to stay away from him because of our infidelities. He is just waiting to bring us out the slavery of our sinfulness to the riches of his promises.

In our everyday lives here in Zambia, we can believe that God is faithful to his promises by the fact that he has chosen many servants to guide and lead us back to himself. The question we can ask ourselves is; "do we recognise who these servant leaders are and do we listen to them and follow their instructions?" In our Zambian Church, these servant leaders may be people like the leaders of our small Christian communities, or priests and Bishops, or sisters and catechists. In our Zambian society these servant leaders might be the boss in our workplace, the local councillor, the head teacher in a school, a dedicated Government official.

We know that God communicates with us through the people he has placed in position of leadership. They act on behalf of God and encourage us to trust in God's providence and leadership. But the sign that a leader is really acting on behalf of God is not simply whether she or he got elected or appointed to an office. No, such a leader must be selflessly serving the people, truly working for the good of the people, not for the good of the leader alone, or the leader's family or tribe or section of the country.

It is sad that many people choose to listen to false servants. They obey people who lead them to destruction rather than prosperity. They believe the cheap promises coming out of the mouths of some national leaders when deep down in their hearts they know that such leaders have failed in the past to fulfil any promises. But God cannot possibly work in selfish leaders who promise so much and yet deliver so little.

The readings of today remind us who a good leader is and what qualities a good leader possesses. A good leader is one who carries out the will of God and leads the people out of any situation that oppresses and enslaves them. A good leader is one who spends time with the people regardless of such people's standing in society – rich or poor, male or female, young or old. A good leader is honest and selfless, intelligent and competent, respectful and respected.

Now these are the qualities that we hear whenever we are going to national elections in Zambia, because they are the qualities spoken about in our Bishops' Pastoral Letters written to advise us about making the right choices. The Bishops don't speak in a partisan fashion because they don't endorse a particular candidate or party. But they do speak in a political fashion by pointing out the problems of the country, the potentials of the country and the directions that our church social teaching gives to us if we want to secure the reconciliation, justice and peace promoted by the Second African Synod.

During this Lenten season of 2010, we should begin to earnestly pray that we Zambians will choose good leaders for our country in the 2011 elections. We know that we live in a country with many problems but also many potentials. Indeed, it is true that the potentials outweigh the problems! So it is not too early to be asking God's guidance for votes that will give us leaders who better apply our potentials to our problems so that all Zambians will participate in true development.

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

1. Do you ever promise something but don't keep the promise? Why or why not?
2. Do you think that the Father in the story of the Two Sons acted wisely or foolishly? Does something like that ever happen in real life?
3. How can you help Zambia to get good leaders to govern us after the 2011 elections?

#### **COMMUNITY PRAYERS**

1. Loving God, Jesus told the story of the Merciful Father and His two Sons to teach us about your great mercy; help us sinners to always trust in your mercy for us. *Lord, hear us. Lord, graciously hear us!*
2. Loving God, you want us to have good leaders in Zambia; help us to make the right choices in the 2011 elections. *Lord, hear us. Lord, graciously hear us!*
3. Loving God, some families in Zambia suffer the loss of their children to drink and sinful lives; help us to be a Church that strengthens family life. *Lord, hear us. Lord, graciously hear us!*

