

First Reading: Micah 5:1-4

Second Reading: Hebrews 10:5-10

Gospel: Luke 1:39-44

LEADERSHIP THROUGH SERVICE

Today is the fourth Sunday of Advent. Soon we will be celebrating the birthday of our Saviour and the Prince of Peace, Our Lord Jesus Christ. We will remember that two thousand years ago he was born among us, becoming human just like us, humbling himself to enter into our world's history. And we will recall that he is still with us each day, in the ordinary events of our lives and in the lives of all our sisters and brothers around us. Christmas is not just a celebration of an event of long ago in a country far away, but it is also a reminder of Christ's presence with us right now, in Zambia, in this year 2006.

The Prophet Micah in the first reading today is reminding us that the promised Messiah would come from the line of King David, but he will humble himself. Indeed, one of the virtues of a true leader is humility. Humility is a mother of all virtues. A humble leader acknowledges his or her strengths and limitations.

In the time of Micah, many leaders had an uncontrolled appetite for wealth and for positions of power. They neglected the poor and exploited their own people. The great City of Jerusalem was full of power hungry leaders. Leaders were not concerned of the needs of their people. Micah promises that God is going to raise among the people a true leader and prince of peace. He will come to shepherd his flock.

We have had leaders in our beloved country of Zambia who are obsessed with wealth and position of power. Such leaders have been architects of the current tribal divisions. We have seen leaders in our communities who are oppressive and domineering. We have had experiences of a syndrome of a few at the top manipulating the many at the bottom. Consequently, this has led to lack of personal, communal and national accountability.

So that is why it is important for us to hear today the ancient but still relevant message of Micah. The prophet is also inviting us to imitate Christ in radical way when we are in leadership. Christ as a humble shepherd is coming to serve and unite his flock. He will be prince of peace.

In the second reading from the letter to the Hebrews, the mission of the Messiah is confirmed as that of doing God's will: "*Here I am, I have come to do your will!*" True leaders must also have respect for God. They obey God by serving others without hidden motives or interests. They do not only make a contribution to the well-being of others, but they are ready to make sacrifices for others. Many leaders in our communities assume positions of authority with the mentality of "Tidyenao" (we have to share the spoils).

It is even worse when such leaders are proud. Then, they become stubborn. They cannot listen to views expressed by those who are entrusted in their care. They become obsessed with power and money and their own opinions. They forget this simple Chewa proverb: "Ukakwela mtengo osatukwana pansi chifukwa ukangwa kulibe azakutola." This teaching warns leaders that as they climb the tree of power, they should not begin to insult those who are still on the ground. A true leader respects his subjects, but he also has confidence in them. As one Bemba proverb instructs us: "Ubufumu buchindika abene" -- meaning that leaders who respect themselves are also respected by the people they lead.

In the Gospel of today, according to Luke, God honours a great leader, a simple young woman

named Mary. She participates in the salvation of humanity through her ready acceptance to do God's will. This makes her a true leader of the people, for she is the one who will bring Jesus to the people.

So as we move now closer to Christmas, we should also be grateful to God and appreciate Mary our mother for accepting to be the mother of our saviour Jesus. With humility in her heart she accepts to be the mother of our Messiah, accepting to participate in our redemption. If God in his plan of salvation decided to involve a woman in such an important position, why do we today allow women to suffer from physical violence, neglect and discrimination?

In fact, we Christians should be ready to give women roles of public leadership in our communities. God himself allowed women to take an active and prominent role in his plan of salvation. We know that women greatly contribute in our communities and in peace building because they are the first teachers of human fellowship. Jesus was born in a human family and led a human life, enjoying human fellowship with Mary and Joseph, his parents. When we hear Gospel stories from the lips of Jesus, we should recognise that many of these stories he probably heard from his parents, Mary and Joseph.

Similarly, parents should always remember that the family is the best school of leadership. Children can learn from the examples of their parents what it means to be a good leader, concerned about the welfare of everyone. Despite the fact that these are difficult economic times, parents should never neglect their parental roles at the expense of making big money. One of the best Christmas gift parents can give their children is spending a lot of time with them. This will benefit not only the children but our whole nation!

Let us contribute in building our "*One Zambia, One Nation*" by passing on good values to our young ones. This is a sure way of uprooting vices like tribalism and corruption. Good leaders understand and serve their communities, whether they are parents in a family, officials appointed in government and business, or politicians elected to office.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND SHARING IN SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

- Can I name some very good leaders whose service I have experienced in the country or in the Church? What qualities do they show to the people?
- Am I a good leader who has followers who have confidence in me? Do I ever abuse my authority as a leader, for example, within the family?
- In what ways can I stop physical violence, neglect and discrimination of women in my community and promote their leadership roles in society and in the Church?

SKETCH

Have two candidates, a woman and a man, compete for a vacant position in the Small Christian Community. A lively debate follows, with some people listing some qualities of a good leader – e.g., honesty, humility, intelligence, hard work, service of all, etc. A woman is evaluated by far the best candidate. She is elected, and everyone, including the man she defeated, congratulates her!

COMMUNITY PRAYERS

- We pray, Lord, that you give us wise leaders who will lead us with humility and love. *Lord, hear our prayer! Lord graciously hear us!*
- We pray, Lord, that you give us the grace to appreciate the contribution of women in our communities. *Lord, hear our prayer! Lord graciously hear us!*
- We pray, Lord, for the gift of the Holy Spirit to sanctify our families so that they may be true schools of Christian values and good public leaders. *Lord, hear our prayer! Lord graciously hear us!*

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