

First Reading: Deuteronomy 26:4-10

Second Reading: Romans 10: 8-13

Gospel: Luke 4:1-13

RESISTING TEMPTATIONS

Once again we enter into a grace filled season of Lent. This is a period of re-evaluation and of making a fresh-start to faithfully following Christian values. One Bemba saying urges, "Iyapelelwa ilya ne cani", an expression that means in times of desperation one can do anything in order to survive. In such a situation, a myriad of temptations, especially the simplest means of survival, would be encountered. Often times, people in desperate circumstances end up making wrong choices and cherish wrong values. But as Christians, we need to emulate Jesus who after being tempted by the devil resisted such temptations (Lk. 4:13). We find good advice in the following Tonga proverb: "Kabayunge bakali bakawale", which cautions us not to blindly follow enticements. Indeed, when one resists temptations in the best way possible, the tempter simply looses and leaves.

Today is the first Sunday of Lent. In the Gospel reading from Luke, the story we read is based on the reality that exists between good and evil. Jesus faces three temptations but he firmly makes the right choices and succeeds in defeating the devil. God has given us the freedom of choice which we sometimes abuse and we end up making wrong choices. All people regardless of their nationality, race, religion or status in society face temptations. In today's environment where untold sufferings are being experienced by the majority of Zambians, the temptations of doing wrong acts to quickly earn a living seem to be the order of the day. Hence, there is a sharp rise in cases of prostitution, burglary, corruption, and other vices. Those who don't use "opportunities" of earning their living in wrong ways are labeled as stupid or naïve. Let us together reflect on the three temptations Jesus went through.

The first temptation invites Jesus to "turn stones into bread" (Lk. 4:3). But Jesus does not go against the use of bread for humans to feed themselves. He simply shows us that his aim on earth was meant to help us go beyond the material and physical well-being of our lives. Even when some people say "no money, no life", there is something better than having material possessions. In the consumer society, it is likely that there is an over-concern about "what one has" as a better standard of living. If one thinks the standard of living is lower than expected, one is often disturbed, confused and discontent.

Thus, other values suffer like relationships and preserving the quality of life. This should not be an excuse for public service providers, government officials and all those in positions of authority to provide very poor services like casualisation of labour, poor health care and poor quality of education standards. We simply need to trust that God is not everything because God has his way of helping us better.

In the second temptation, Jesus is enticed to abuse his power for personal fulfillment. In many instances this temptation is too real in our nation today. There are reports of people who use all the available means to acquire a position of leadership. Such is evident in the use of colossal amounts of money in campaigns. Others have even stolen, betrayed, or even killed in order to become a leader. Worse still, some have even deliberately delayed or manipulated the process of coming up with a new Constitution that might disturb their comfortable positions. There is an ego in us which suggests that power must be used for ourselves and not for the service of others. It is therefore imperative that whoever holds authority must re-evaluate oneself. Leaders in politics, religion and other office bearers must ask themselves this question: Is my authority meant to serve the people, or to add to my power base, or to serve my ego?

In the last temptation, Jesus is asked to jump from the Temple's pinnacle and told that the angels would take care of him (Lk. 4:9). Nowadays, there seem to be an unwritten law that states "Do miracles and people will flock to you". It is very important to re-evaluate our religious commitment truthfully. Why do I try to live a genuine Christian life? Is it because of my intense and genuine love for God? Do I say I am a committed Christian and therefore God "must" take good care of me? Do I treat God as an insurance policy who has to reward me now, looking at how good I have been? A real love for God is one that does not put God to the test or treat Him as an insurance policy.

During this season of Lent, let us re-examine our lives in light of Jesus' exemplary example, that is, to resist temptations. If they do not match up with Jesus' way of life then we must repent immediately. Let us emulate Jesus who despite being "tempted in all things but never sinned" (Heb. 4:15). Since we know that "everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved" (Rom. 10:13). Thus, we must call upon Him if we are to succeed in defeating the devil's temptations. Above all, the God who saved the Israelites from their bondage in Egypt, as we read in the first reading, will not let us down (Deut. 26:8). As we read in the Gospel, the devil will simply lose and leave us (Lk. 4:13).

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND SHARING IN SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

- Do I identify and resist the many different temptations that I encounter in my life?
- How do I react to the three temptations Jesus went through?
- What can we do as a Christian community to help others from falling deeper into temptations and sin?

SKETCH

Have two families. Family A is very much concerned about their standard of living. The family looks through adverts in papers, magazines and journals in search of latest fashions, latest recipe for an advanced dish, latest phones, music or function in town. In the long run they become broke and end up being a very useless family with a bleak future.

Family B is content with what they have and have no time to compare their livelihood with others. They know their limitations and simply thank God for their possessions. They end up being successful as they simply steadily rise and become a model of a humble and successful family who put God first in their lives.

COMMUNITY PRAYERS

- Lord, we pray for all those that have given into temptations due to poverty that they may come back to you and recognise your hand at work in their troubled lives. *Lord, hear our prayer! Lord graciously hear us!*
- Lord, we pray for strength to resist temptations and to follow you faithfully. *Lord, hear our prayer! Lord graciously hear us!*
- Lord, we pray for all those in positions of leadership that they may use their positions to serve those entrusted in their care. *Lord, hear our prayer! Lord graciously hear us!*