

First Reading: Exodus 3:1-8, 13-15

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 10:1-6, 10-12

Gospel: Luke 13:1-9

INFLUENCING SOCIETY THROUGH PERSONAL LIFESTYLE

When things are going below the expected standards, people tend to react in several different ways. In places of work, for example, we hear of employees going on strike due to poor wages, bad working conditions, or delayed payment of salaries as is often the case with civil servants. Moreover, we have seen students in higher learning institutions boycotting classes or even rioting to express their displeasure and anger on some unacceptable prevailing circumstances. We have also received messages of dissatisfaction by concerned members of society about the undesirable Constitution making process. In the same vein, dissatisfied losing politicians in the just ended tripartite elections have filed petitions in the courts of law against alleged malpractices. All these and many other examples show different expressions and reactions of people to undesirable situations that may need to be changed.

On this third Sunday of Lent, we reflect upon the urgency of repentance in a bid to enhance our Christian lives. During this time of Lent there is great emphasis on examining our lives and changing for the better through repentance. In today's readings there is an insistence on the urgency and necessity of repentance. Repentance entails the recognition of areas of unfaithfulness in our lives and being ready to make reparations. In Nyanja they say, "Pepani sapoletsa cilonda", meaning that a wound is never healed just by saying sorry. Thus, the urgency of repentance here demands that it should not only be a lip service event but also be exemplified in our actions. If we only do it as a lip service we would be compared to somebody who repents of having stolen a cell-phone but is not ready to return it to the owner. Our repentance must be accompanied by a changed behaviour.

The first reading of today from the book of Exodus shares Moses' wonderful experience. He was more than ready to change when he encountered God in the burning bush. Moses had his own way of life, plans, preferences and ideas that determined his course of action. But he never hesitated at the call of God. God puts it very clear that He is fully aware of the untold suffering of His people and that He was more than ready to help them. God revealed to Moses -- and to us today -- that He is *all caring* and *all loving* to His own. We may have also experienced situations that demand for our change of heart and behaviour. Our "burning bushes" could be the poor needing our help, the sick and prisoners needing our visitation. In Bemba they say "Nangombe pabana taya", meaning that a cow never runs away from her calves. This is how God gets concerned about His children, especially those that recognise the urgency of conversion.

In the same way, God has seen our sufferings in Zambia today. For example, high unemployment levels, casualisation of labour, lack of corporate social responsibility by most investors, water and air pollution, HIV/AIDS pandemic, delayed and poor salaries experienced mostly by civil servants are a few problems that we encounter. God has heard the cry of the suffering majority Zambians who according to available information cover about 70% to 80% of our population. Our hope simply lies in the loving God who redeemed the Israelites from bondage. The bondage we need to be redeemed from is that of sin. This can be achieved by our willingness to respond positively to the call of conversion. We must be willing to change in order to change the society in which we live.

The Gospel of today presents the urgency of repentance in a more serious manner saying, "unless you repent, you will perish as they did" (Lk.13:5). Moreover, the parable of the fig tree equates sin to unfruitfulness of the fig tree. Sin here is referred to as unfruitfulness or our falling short of what we were meant to be. We as Christians are often impoverished by our own unfruitfulness. Repentance

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in this case entails the need to leave behind all that prevents us from being the sort of people we are meant to be.

God calls us from slavery of sin to freedom as was the case of Moses. It is imperative that we all examine our areas of frustration, unfulfilment and unfruitfulness. More often we get locked up in fear of doing what is right, resentments, envy or refusal to forgive someone. All this forms our way of looking at ourselves and other people. All of us, regardless of age, nationality, colour, tribe or rank in society are, in one way or the other, confronted with enslaving tendencies to sin. To achieve acceptable way of life we need to cooperate and work towards changing ourselves and consequently change the society in which we live in.

Moreover, although there is an urgent demand for repentance, it must be noted cautiously here that conversion is a process. It does not just happen instantly like lighting a bulb or blinking an eye. Anybody who is ready to repent one's sins must have a heart that is ready to make reparations for the sins committed. But how can this be shown? There is need to have an overall review of our lives. For example, political leaders who are corrupt and abuse their authority must change. Similarly, unfaithful spouses, immoral children, hypocritical religious men and women must change for the better. We do not need miracles or to wait for Christ's second coming in order for us to change. This season of Lent offers us with an opportune time to consider the urgency of repentance and to get converted.

Repentance, therefore, demands that we become honest to ourselves and recognise our unfruitfulness. It is only after such a serious reflection that we shall have that remorse for our failures. This feeling would help us recognise the virtue of humility to turn to Christ and ask him to lead us from the bondage of sin to freedom. Let us take advantage of this period of preparation to uphold the urgency of repentance and get converted in the best way possible. Let us take advantage of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND SHARING IN SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

- Do I see the need to repent and ask for forgiveness from God and people around me?
- What areas in our community need urgent attention in order to be transformed?
- What are we doing or planning to do to influence national issues that need to be changed?

SKETCH:

Have a family experiencing great trouble due to the drunkenness of one of the parents. The wife or husband and children and the close neighbours do not live in harmony due to his or her unbecoming and disturbing behaviour. After he or she narrowly escapes death in a drunken state, he or she decides to quit drinking. The family and neighbours live in peace and encourage him or her never to drink again. Happiness returns to the house and the neighbourhood, and the ex-drunkard is even healthier and enjoys a newly converted lifestyle of peace and dignity.

COMMUNITY PRAYERS

- Lord, we pray for our Church leaders that they may lead exemplary lives. *Lord, hear our prayer! Lord graciously hear us!*
- Lord, we pray that all of us may know our need to be converted, to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and to become more loving and more caring. *Lord, hear our prayer! Lord graciously hear us!*
- Lord, we pray for all those who do not know you and those who have strayed from you that they may realise your love for them. *Lord, hear our prayer! Lord graciously hear us!*