

First Reading: Joshua 5: 9,10-12

Second Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

Gospel: Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

BE OPEN TO FORGIVE AND RECONCILE

The parable of a prodigal son and the forgiving father which we read in the Gospel is a very well-known story. It has been told many times to refer to several circumstances especially where there is an urge for forgiveness and reconciliation. The reaction of the forgiving father can be received with mixed feelings especially by people who emphasise much on revenge. Yet, the joy of the forgiven son can not be hidden. As Christians we should be ready to forgive and reconcile. In Chewa they say, “Coipa citsata mwini”, meaning that one does not get away with evil, one day you will pay for it, its “reward” will come to you.

Today’s first reading from the book of Joshua, narrates the story of how the Jewish people returned from Egypt. Joshua says, “Today I have taken the shame of Egypt away from you” (Joshua 5:9), an expression of Jewish liberation. St. Paul’s letter to the Corinthians in the second reading emphasises Christ’s coming to reconcile the world. There is a hint that it was all God’s work and as such we also need to be reconciled to God. The brilliant story of the prodigal son in the Gospel of today sums up all the readings.

As we draw closer to the celebration of Easter, it is very important to emphasise the need for us Christians to go for confession. The prodigal son realised that things did not work well with him and so he decided to go back home. Things became unbelievably better for him than he had expected. We must also learn to face reality, feel remorse for the sins we have committed and go to confession. We must realise that no matter how serious our sins are, God is more than ready to joyfully welcome us home.

In appreciating the Father’s goodness, we also must give a message of forgiveness to our parents or guardians in homes. In cases of a daughter being impregnated, or a son drinking and smoking dagga, parents must have an open ear and ready heart to accept their children who asks for forgiveness. The parents’ love for their children must be closer to God’s love for His children.

As one Bemba proverb encourages, “umwana kasembe, kakukoma wakobeka”, meaning that a child can be compared to an axe which remains your valued tool even when you hurt yourself with it. In Chewa they say, “Cibale ndi litsiro, sicansika”, meaning that a family relationship is like dirt, it cannot be gotten rid of. Above all, solidarity in families, whether in sorrowful and joyful times, is what is needed.

The importance of forgiving one another can not be over emphasised. It calls for our humility and love for our fellow human beings and be able to get reconciled. Where relations are sour, vengeful and unappreciated, the harmonious growth of any community is hampered. All in all, we need others for us to develop.

Similarly, community leaders in Small Christian Communities and parishes must be open and willing to forgive those that stray from the laid down rules and regulations. If any of our members backslides and become very “unchristian”, it is a duty of every Christian to take

courage and approach the erring Christian with the aim of winning him or her back to Christianity.

Condemning and labeling stray Christians with all sorts of bad names would not help build them but harden their unwillingness to change. We have a myriad of examples where many husbands who after receiving their terminal benefits or pension, desert their families and get married to “money loving women” only to return after the money is finished. What is supposed to be the duty of each Christian when such things happen? To sit back, relax and laugh at the offenders? No, there is definitely something that we ought to do. For example, comforting and helping where appropriate these affected families.

The parable also challenges those responsible for prison inmates. The condition of prisoners needs attention. Prison warders must bear in mind that they are working to reform those jailed brothers and sisters. Prisoners must never be insulted or beaten; instead they must be shown the love and care that they need. Moreover, when they are released, they must be warmly welcomed to their homes and communities they once lived in. Discriminating them would simply make them feel unwelcome and as such seek ways of returning to where they felt accepted, that is, in the prison.

Those in political leadership must as well learn from the forgiving father to have a forgiving heart and a spirit of reconciling, especially of their political contenders. This is because Christians must uphold the value of forgiveness wherever they are. In Bemba one saying goes, “umusuku ubi, ubifya impanga”, meaning a bad musuku tree would make the whole forest to be condemned. Thus, if Christians are not giving a good example of reconciling with one another wherever they are, it could be concluded that they are all unforgiving. Thus, in all sectors where Christians are found, they must shine out and embrace joyfully the virtues of forgiveness and reconciliation.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND SHARING IN SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

- Am I open to forgive and reconcile with all those who have wronged me?
- What am I doing to help those in prisons?
- What are we doing as a community to help those families whose husbands or wives have deserted their families for reasons such as one partner being HIV/AIDS positive?

SKETCH

Have a family living happily and peacefully. One child due to other influences leaves the family and leads a very bad lifestyle. Months later he or she realises how wrong that move was to the whole family and decides to go back home. He or she is warmly welcomed and begins to live a good life.

COMMUNITY PRAYERS

- Lord, we pray for the spirit of solidarity in our families and in our Small Christian Communities. *Lord, hear our prayer! Lord graciously hear us!*
- Lord, we pray for people infected and affected by HIV/AIDS, that you may comfort them and teach us how to comfort them. *Lord, hear our prayer! Lord graciously hear us!*
- Lord, we pray for your spirit and guidance during this time of Lent, so that we may joyfully celebrate Easter. *Lord, hear our prayer! Lord graciously hear us!*