

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Dec 13th 2014

St. Lucy

The Jews believed that prophet Elijah ascended to heaven alive in a whirlwind (2Kg 2:11). So, the Jews understood that Elijah did not die and he would return to prepare the way for the “Day of the Lord”. This is well articulated by prophet Malachi, “I will send you Elijah, the prophet, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and terrible day” (4:5). Even now, orthodox Jews put an empty chair at the Seder table for Elijah. The reformed Jews put a “cup of Elijah” at the table. They hope year after year as the year of his returning from heaven before the day of the Lord. Some Jews of Jesus time thought that Jesus was actually the prophet Elijah whose return they had been hoping for (Mk 8:28). It is in this context that the disciples asked Jesus, why the scribes said that Elijah must come first. Jesus clarified saying that Elijah had already come but the people had not recognized him. John the Baptist was the expected Elijah who had been preparing the way of the Lord. But, he was treated harshly, even to the point of beheading him. Jesus goes further and predicts that he himself would meet the same fate. On 16th March 2013, members of an offshoot of the Nigerian jihadist group Boko Haram claimed that they had executed seven foreign Christians in North Nigeria. Again, in March 2013, 13 factory workers identified as Christians were murdered for being Christians at Sheka, North Nigeria. If Jesus and John had to suffer, then we too as Christians would suffer following their footsteps.

2014 Dec 14 SUN: THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

FIRST READING: Is 61:1–2a, 10–11

SECOND READING: 1 Thes 5:16–24

GOSPEL: Jn 1:6–8, 19–28

Everyone wants to be happy. Everyone seeks happiness in different ways. “Where is happiness? I badly need it.” seems to be the constant question. People look for it in different ways. Some seek happiness in Churches, temples and mosques while others look for it in pleasure, worldly things, human beings, drugs, sex, etc. Sadly, instead of being happy and satisfied, people often end up with frustration and disappointment. Genuine happiness seems to be a rare commodity. It is in this context, St. Paul invites us to be happy and happy always. Prophet Isaiah exclaimed, “I rejoice heartily in the

Lord, in my God is the joy of my soul”. Well, everyone longs for happiness but how can one be genuinely happy? The readings of today propose two keys.

We are all created by God. He is the only creators. Everything else is created by him. So, we need to be detached from creatures and the worldly things and be attached to the Lord, the creator. It is important to question ourselves to see where we have put our trust and attachment. When we cling on to God, even if we have difficulties, problems and sufferings, we will not be shattered. St. Paul was happy and happy always because he was fully in the Lord and mingled himself with the Lord to such an extent that he would say, “it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me”. Since his complete dependence and attachment was with the Lord, he was able to say in the letter of joy, the letter to the Philippians, “I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ” (Phil 3:8). He continues, “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice” (4:4).

The second key to be happy always in spite of the ocean of suffering is self-acceptance, accepting ourselves as we are. We are created in the image of God and we are the crown of creation. As Jim Jigler says, God does not create useless fellows. We are the wonders and miracles of the world. If we do not accept ourselves, who then will accept us? People often suffer because they do not accept themselves; they do not appreciate the goodness that is in them. Instead, they go on dreaming of what they are not and what they do not have. Often, we compare with others and think as if all others are happy except us. This leads to inferiority complex, frustration, disappointment and finally to depression. John the Baptist accepted himself as he was; he was not Messiah or Elijah but he was the voice of one crying out in the desert.” He confessed that. He did not grab someone’s identity but was happy in what he was. Let us be happy by being attached with the Lord and accepting ourselves as we are.

2014 Dec 15 Mon: Advent Weekday

1st Reading: Nm 24: 2-7. 15-17a

GOSPEL Mt 21: 23-27

The chief priests were the official teachers of the Jewish religion. There were the ones who had all authority. They confronted Jesus with the question, “On what authority are you doing these things?” What is this these things? The context makes clear that these things referred to his cleaning of the temple, healing of the blind and lame and his teachings of Good News. As official religious leaders, they did not give authority to Jesus. Then, who gave him? They wanted to challenge Jesus. Jesus could have said that he needed no authority to do what was good or he received the authority to do good to the poor and the suffering from his Father who is all goodness. But he did not do so. Instead, he used

the old proven technique of answering a question with a question. He shifted the attention from himself to John the Baptist. John was not approved by the Jewish leaders but people had high regard for him and for his teaching. Thus the tricky question, “What authority did John baptise?” The chief priests did not want to approve John nor offend the people who had high regard for him. Well, their reply “we do not know” partially admitted that it was from God. Yes, every child of God has the authority to do good. Rather, every child of God must do good to everyone and everywhere. We need not be afraid of anyone to shout against injustice or do what is good. Like Jesus, we have another living example in the person of Nelson Mandela!

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