

“The Ministry of Reconciliation”

Fessahaye Mebrahtu

The Lenten Season is more about God’s compassionate move, pulling us back to him whenever we stray from him. Our little gestures of Lenten sacrifice are simply limited human responses to God’s unconditional love, acknowledging “who we are and whose we are.” God always takes the first steps to bring back to order, what we put in disorder because of our sins. In the second reading, St. Paul states, “All this is from God who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation...” With such understanding, St. Paul says, “We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” To create us a new “for our sake he (God) made him (Christ) to be sin who did not know sin.” This reminds me of my cultural background. Parents whose children repeatedly die as infants, they give unusual names to the next live born. “Goadouf” garbage or rubbish is one of the traditional common names. I have ancestor 10 generations removed from me by the name of “Goadouf.” God must have heard the cry of his parents for death to see him as undesirable. He was spared from infant death to become the ancestor of multitude clans and several villages. Like this story, Christ has become, the receptacle of all garbage to cleanse and spare us from our sins. Lent high lights the extend of God’s mercy to include us in his master plan of salvation mystery.

The first reading reminds of such master plan. God entered a covenant with the people of Israel, “I will be your God and your will be my people.” According to his plan, he led his people from oppression and slavery to the promised land. Covenant requires mutuality, each party to keep his/her side of the promise and obligations. We as human beings, we are first renege our promise. The Lord gave the people of Israel all sorts of signs, reminding them of his enduring covenant. As human beings we demand our rights but overlook our obligations, especially in our relation to God. The Gospel reading tells us that the younger son demanding his share of his inheritance from the father is demanding for his rights, neglecting his filial obligation.

The story, which is normally called “the Prodigal Son” or the “Compassionate Father,” depending on what we want to emphasize. In this parable, we do not pay attention that the younger son breaking a cultural taboo. Asking for your inheritance while the parent still alive. Either it was a death wish on his father or considering him as dead. The father knew the implications of caving into his son’s demand for his share of inheritance. The younger son, who declared his own father dead while still alive the Gospel tells us, “Coming to his sense he thought... I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.” It was only when hit rock-bottom he came back to his senses.

Sometimes, we are like the younger son, giving our back to the Lord as if he is dead. A fish cannot say to the water I do not need you and try to survive on a dry land. In such case, the survival rate of the fish in a dry land is minimal. The omnipresence of God is like the fish and the water or like the oxygen we breathe, our lifeline. The Psalmist felt compelled to admit and profess God's omnipresence expressing, "Where can I hide from your spirit? From your presence, where can I flee?... If I say, "Surely darkness shall hide me, and night shall be my light" Darkness is not dark for you, and night shines as the day. Darkness and light are but one" (Ps. 139: 7, 11-12). Like the younger son, the writer must have hit rock bottom to come back to his senses, uttering those profound words. It is time for us to examine our life. Where do we fit in the grand scheme of relating to God? God has initiated the ministry and mystery of reconciliation to make us "a new creation" "so that we might become the righteousness of God in him."