

29th May 2016 service

Readings: I Kings 18.20-21, 30-39 O.T. p.299
Galatians 1.1-12 N.T.p166

Our two readings this morning, to me, serve to reinforce one of the characteristics of human beings ie the tendency to forget.

And yet, it comes as a surprise when matters that have been influencing factors in shaping our lives it be emotionally, physically, or psychologically are forgotten.

The Bible is full of instances where the Children of Israel or we Christians have been confronted with this weakness.

Our two readings for today are therefore reactions by Elijah and Paul to what they perceived as serious problems of forgetfulness among their believing populations.

In our first reading, we are reminded of an event where prophet Elijah challenged the children of Israel into making a choice between serving the God of their fore-parents or the foreign gods imposed on them. In the gospels too, we read about Jesus also making statements such as “you cannot serve two masters”.

Our second reading is basically a telling off by Paul of the Galatian Christians for forgetting what they had been taught regarding the Christian faith.

In the letter to the Galatians, Paul did not waste time to make known his feelings - “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel”.

The possible reasons for such a stern rebuke to me is that the churches in Galatia were among those founded during Paul’s’ first missionary journey. Acts chapters 13-15 contain records of the considerable time and effort in establishing those churches. In the cities of Lystra for example, Paul and Barnabas were taken to be Roman gods because of the miracles they did (Acts 14:9). Later on Paul was stoned and left for dead. So there is the interest to ensure their success.

So what makes it difficult or why are we scared to effectively practice our Christian beliefs when we are told that the Holy Spirit is here to help us? Why can’t we share our faith if we really believe that the bible is full of interesting and life-changing stories and teachings?

1. Fear

The 1 Kings’ reading happened because of the ungodly and coercive influence of Jezebel, who made the worship of baal the nation’s religion.

In the Galatian reading, there was pressure from the teachers of conflicting teachings which were luring the young Christians away from their new found faith.

In our age, our inability to effectively practice our Christian faith may be due to the fear of being mocked, failing, being the odd one out, etc. I think this tends to be the case when we do not know what we believe and who we are in Christ Jesus.

Paul says “I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is..”

He also says “ God has not given us the spirit of fear...”

Again, he says “study to show yourself approved of God...”

Just as Elijah and Paul recognised their responsibilities to keep the Faiths impacted to them alive, so do I believe that we need to find ways and means of discharging our respective duties or callings in this intimidating world that we live in.

2. Compromise

We live in a world where on a daily basis, we are bombarded with adverts telling us how our living could improve if we had this item or that. Also, we live in a world where government legislations, pressure groups and conflicting information are slowly dictating what we should believe and how we should act.

Over time, we are ceasing to be the salt and light of our world in order to keep one's peaceful life in one piece.

Living the life of a Christian has become a past time as it is not to inconvenience us. Elijah and Paul's challenge to us is to choose this day whom you will serve.

3. Loss of our first love

What once inspired you regarding the Christian faith? We as a church live in a very competitive world which is placing so much demands on us that we are gradually losing our focus and having less time for God.

As a church, what do we need to do to keep our passion for the gospel burning? How do we go back for those things which we once loved doing. Yes, age will hinder the performance of certain activities but there is a saying that where there is a will there is a way.

The challenge for us today is to go back to where we left our first love and to pick it up.

Conclusion

God in times past have raised people who spoke with prophetic voices urging their hearers to turn to Him, God.

Paul's letter to the Galatians and the competition on mount Carmel are attempts to persuade the fickle - minded followers of God of their respective times to

turn back to the worship of the one true God. I wonder if we have deviated in our beliefs? Have we grown cold in the things of God? If so, can we hear the prophetic voices of our day beckoning us to turn back to God's mission?

Our two readings give us cues as to how to go about this God-given responsibility.

Elijah, in our reading isn't interested in a theological debate. He wants a practical manifestation of God's power that will provoke publicly a religious decision.

Paul in his letter to the Galatians on the other hand is interested in a religious discussion which would result in practical manifestation of Godly character.

We have a gospel to proclaim, a gospel which is alive and affects life.

Not far away we have the memorial of those who dared to stand for their faiths and lost their lives at the stakes.

May the Lord help us as we continue to struggle to make meaning of this our Christianity