

Second Meeting: Relative to the 3rd Sunday of Advent.

## **‘What must we do, then?’**

*Professions are for serving, not for self-serving*

**Preparation:** Those conducting the meeting arrive first ahead of the others to set everything up and welcome the members of the group. (If considered appropriate, supply name tags).

Place a Baptismal rite beside the Bible (so the title can be seen) and papers with a wide variety of professions (making sure the occupations of group members are listed).

### **Welcome setting and Opening Hymn:**

Thank you for coming and finding the time to study together our way of making the Word of God enable us to become involved in favour of justice. Since our last meeting we took some decision together: let us speak about them openly for a few moments - (max. 20 minutes).

Let us joyfully sing to show our attachment to this Word. Hymn on the theme of conversion of heart.

**Prayer:** The ideal is for the prayer to be spontaneous and made by one of the leaders or another group member, but in the sense of faith compelling us to seek justice. Otherwise, we could recite this prayer from the Mass for the Development of Peoples:

L'idéal est que la prière soit spontanée et faite par l'un des animateurs ou un autre membre du groupe, mais dans le sens de la foi qui pousse à rechercher de la justice. Sinon on peut réciter cette prière tirée de la Messe pour le développement des peuples: *Father, you have given all peoples one common origin, and your will is to gather them as one family in yourself. Fill the hearts of all with the fire of your love and the desire to ensure justice for all their brothers and sisters. By sharing the good things you give us may we secure justice and equality for every human being, an end to all division, and a human society built on love and peace. Through Christ Our Lord, Amen.*

**1- Let us examine our lives:** Seeing these symbols displayed on the table:

- *What are you thinking about? Do you see the link between them?*
- *What picture do people receive of those who are in your profession (your studies)?*

From the beginning of independence in Africa, Christians played a very important part in administration and leading posts, even in countries where they were in the minority. Today many of those who are in their offices to serve their fellow-citizens are Christians who sometimes abuse their office and forget the social implications of their faith.

Questions for sharing:

- *Have you ever been the victim of an abuse of power or an attempt at corruption?*
- *Have you ever benefited from the honesty of a civil servant or a politician?*

**2- Sung Acclamation of the Word of God** (the choice of the lead group, but in the line of the Word that changes lives). **Gospel Reading: Lk 3: 10-18.** It will be read twice, leaving a time of silence between the two readings.

**Deepen the meaning of the reading:** The acts of spiritual conversion of which Saint Luke speaks in this passage are in a profession and social context : sharing, doing one's duty with justice, not exploiting one's station in life, etc. The Good News divides people into two groups: those who hear it and change their lives, and those who do not change (or are satisfied with good intentions.)

- *In the reading, which phrase challenged you most? Explain...*
- *Knowing that we will be for the most part, executives, how do we understand v.18, which tells us that this demanding message is part of the proclamation of the Good News?*
- *John the Baptist speaks of Jesus as someone who is powerful. When have you felt his power in order to live more honestly?*

**3- Prayer:** In **Psalm 72** we find the ideal portrait of the Messianic Leader. It is also a model for all Christians who have or will have responsibilities. Let us recite it in two choirs:

- a- God, give your own justice to the king, your own righteousness to the royal son, so that he may rule your people rightly and your poor with justice.*
- b- Let the mountains and hills bring a message of peace for the people. Uprightly he will defend the poorest, he will save the children of those in need, and crush their oppressors.*
- a- Like sun and moon he will endure, age after age, welcome as rain that falls on the pasture, and showers to thirsty soil.*
- In his days, virtue will flourish a universal peace till the moon is no more; his empire shall stretch from sea to sea, from the river to the ends of the earth.*
- b- The Beast will cower before him and his enemies grovel in the dust; the kings of Tarshish and of the islands will pay him tribute. The kings of Sheba and Seba will offer gifts; all kings will do him homage, all nations become his servants.*
- a- He will free the poor man who calls to him, and those who need help, he will have pity on the poor and feeble, and save the lives of those in need;*
- b- he will redeem their lives from exploitation and outrage, their lives will be precious in his sight.*
- (Long may he live, may gold from Sheba be given him!) Prayer will be offered for him constantly, blessings invoked on him all day long.*
- a- Blessed for ever be his glorious name, may the whole world be filled with his glory! Amen. Amen!*

#### **4- Putting the Word of God into practice.**

The greatest obstacle to moralising public life is the absence of honest believers in the cogs of society. Christians are so convinced that they are powerless that they forsake their responsibilities. Let us try to reply to the question posed in the Gospel: **‘What must we do?’**

- *In our present situation: what would be the first step (even a little one) we could take to clean up our social life, our surroundings, and our community?*
- *With whom could we associate to have greater inner strength and more impact?*

- *Howe can we support those who wish to live more honestly?*
- *Justice and Baptism are inseparable. How can we live out this bond?*

The meeting should not conclude without taking clear decisions.

Prepare the next meeting: place, date, leaders...

**Final Hymn** in the line of the mission Jesus entrusts to the members of his Church.

## MOVING AHEAD

### Some more ideas ....

- a- Think about this idea: 'If there were more Christians in political life...'
- b- Read 'Le Cardinal Duval, Evêque en Algérie', Ed. Le Centurion, 1984. There you find testimony of a Christian committed to justice, for the sake of his faith, in situations that were not very orthodox.
- c- Choose one of the following texts and organise a discussion with friends motivated by the desire for social commitment for the sake of their faith.

### **Obama comes to faith through the seeing Christian social action**

*In his autobiography 'Dreams from My Father' (Canongate Books Ltd) 1995, 2004, Barack Obama relates how during his activity as community organiser (a mixture of social worker, trade unionist and NGO militant), he worked alongside different Churches to improve the lot of the Black inhabitants of the suburbs of Chicago. A pastor asked him where he drew the strength to work for others and he could not answer. One day, he decided to attend the Sunday service of a pastor who was particularly committed. Here is the account of his conversion:*

The Reverend Wright's sermon was entitled 'The Audacity of Hope'. He began from a passage in the Book of Samuel, the story of Hannah, sterile and scorned by her rivals.

...This is our world, a world where cruise ships dump more food in one day that the inhabitants of Port-au-Prince see in a year, where the cupidity of Whites direct a world of poverty, apartheid in one hemisphere, apathy in the other. Such is the world! The world on which hope rests!

He went on with this meditation about a world fallen even lower: Reverend Wright spoke of Sharpsville, Hiroshima, and the inhumanity of politicians in the White House. However, as the sermon progressed, the story of conflicts became more commonplace, the suffering more immediate. The Reverend mentioned the hard times the assembly would have to confront on the morrow, the suffering of those who were far from the summit of the mountain and wondered how to pay their electricity bill. But also the suffering of those who were nearer the metaphorical summit: the middle class woman whose every material need has been satisfied, but whose husband treated her 'like a maid, a cleaner, a driver and escort *girl*, all in one person.'; the child whose rich parents

are more worried about the 'texture of the hair on its head than the quality of education inside it.' Like Hannah, we have known hard times! Day after day, we undergo rejection and despair! Hannah, she dared to hope... she had audacity... and she sang the glory of God... the little he had left over!

The congregation started to cry out and stand up and clap their hands and the powerful surge of his breath carried the reverend's voice to the rafters. From my seat, I observed and listened and I heard all the notes of the three years past whirlwind around me. The courage and fear of Ruby and Will. The anger of the men proud of their race like Rafiq. The desire to let go, to escape, to surrender to a God that could reduce despair to nil.

I heard something else in these simple notes (Hope!) At the foot of this cross, inside the thousands of churches spread throughout the town, I saw the story of ordinary Blacks combine with those of David and Goliath, Moses and Pharaoh, Christians thrown to the lions, the valley of bones in Ezekiel. These stories, of survival, freedom, hope became our story, my story; the blood that had been spilled was our blood, those tears, our tears. This black Church, on this fine day, had become a ship transporting the history of a people into future generations and to a greater world. Our struggles and triumphs suddenly became unique and universal, for blacks and for more than blacks. Chronicling our journey, the stories and the songs gave us the means to reclaim the memories, of which we were not to be ashamed, of memories more accessible than those of Ancient Egypt, memories that everyone could study and cherish – and with which we could begin to rebuild. And if a part of myself continued to think that the communion of this Sunday sometimes simplified our condition that it could not sometimes disguise or eliminate the reality of conflicts that tore us apart and that it would not fulfil its promises other than by action, I felt also, for the first time, that this atmosphere brought with it, vague and incomplete the possibility of going beyond our restricted dreams.

(The Pastor went on) The audacity of hope! I remember my grandmother who sang all over the house, 'Every cloud has a silver lining, don't rest until you find it...' The audacity of hope! I remember when we could not pay our bills. Times when I had the impression that I would always be good for nothing... at 15, arrested for car stealing... and nevertheless mama and poppa continued to sing...

'Thank you Jesus, Thank you Jesus, Thank you Jesus, Lord, you have made me come a long, long way.'

As for me, I did not understand why they were singing! Why would they thank Him for all their problems? That is what I wondered. However, it was just that I was looking at the horizontal dimension of their lives! !

I did not understand that they were speaking about the vertical dimension – of their relationship to God! I did not understand that they were thanking him in advance for all they dared to hope for me! Oh, thank you Jesus, for not having dropped me what I dropped you! Oh yes, Jesus, I thank you!'

When the choir rose to sing, when the congregation began to applaud those who approached the altar to accept the call of the Reverend Wright, I felt someone brush my hand. I then saw the older of two little boys seated beside me stretch out a paper handkerchief, slightly worried. Beside him his mother looked at me with a slight smile

before turning towards the altar. I thanked the little boy and only then felt the tears run down my cheeks.

- O Jesus, I heard my older neighbour murmur, thank you for bringing us thus far.

*(Summary of pages 309-313)*

Here is an extract from the Blessing Ritual for a place of work or business. With other Christians, discuss the meaning of these prayers, the graces requested, the consequences of making the link between faith and the workplace.

## PRAYER OF BLESSING

### *For an office*

God in your providence you wish to fill all human activity with your blessing, mind and body: grant us the support of your help to all those who in this place will seek to explore problems and resolve difficulties so that they may reach the end of their research and find the results desired. Through Christ Our Lord. Amen.

### *For a factory or workshop*

Lord our God, by working wood with his hands, your Son raised the dignity of human work and taught us to associate our work with his work of redemption. Grant to your faithful the blessing they implore so that by giving themselves to the transformation of your creation, they may recognise their dignity and may rejoice in contributing to the well-being of the human family, to the praise of your glory. Through Christ Our Lord. Amen.

### *For a business*

God our Father, in your providence you have given the earth and its produce to men and women, so that their work may contribute to supply each one with the goods you have created. Bless all those who are employed in these works so that justice and charity may be respected in sales and purchases; may business people be artisans of the common good and may they thus rejoice to take part in the progress of the earthly city. Through Christ Our Lord. Amen.