

I HAVE BEEN TOUCHED BY YOUR HEARTPRINTS....



A month, ago I was touched by the heartprints of a young lady and a group of secondary school students.

Many of us often see ourselves as poor, not having much, we say that we have 'nothing'. We often complain about how hard life is. We concentrate on what we would love to have but don't have; ***a car, a better house, a particular type of dress, being able to eat a particular type of food regularly, childrens school fees, our own school feels, school fees of sibling/s etc.*** We concentrate and fix our gaze on what we do not have to the detriment of recognizing what we are blessed with (***what we have and who we are; life, good health, physically fit, mentally fit, having parent/s, having a child/ren, having a place to live in, having a job, having a farm/garden, being able to enjoy a meal a day, we have eyes, hands, ears, are able to move around etc.***) which others may not.

This attitude has become worse during the Covid19 pandemic. Nations and individuals complain of how the pandemic has made them poorer. Go to the market and ask a tomato seller to reduce the price for you, and the usual response these days is, ***"mmmh my friend, Corona has made it difficult for all of us"***. Go to a friend or a neighbour or a colleague to ask for financial help, the usual response we often hear these days is ***"mmmm, my friend, corona has made life harder and I don't have anything"***. This becomes a closing-up of ourselves to share with others who are less fortunate than we are and who need our help, who need us to stretch out our hand to them in love (***"To the Poor also extend your hand" Sirach 7:32***). It is a way of turning away my gaze from the less fortunate who may disturb my conscience if I look at them. And so the temptation these days for many, including us Christian Catholics is to count every kwacha or ngwee (coin) or whatever I have for myself alone, my own welfare and those of my family. Enough! Capwa!! (fininshed) After all life is hard. Corona has made it even harder... My gaze is only on myself, my welfare and my immediate family.

The book of Sirach challenges me and challenges us all;

TO THE POOR (*less fortunate*) **ALSO EXTEND YOUR HAND- Sirach 7:32**. And the book of **proverbs 31:20** (in the first reading on the 33rd Sunday of Year A) also challenges me /us in the same way- **HOLD OUT YOUR HAND TO THE POOR. OPEN OUT YOUR ARMS TO THE NEEDY**. And even more in the parable of the Good Samaritan Lk 10:25-36. In your life as a Christian and as a catholic (**who**

goes to mass daily/weekly/annually/from time to time, who prays the rosary, attends meetings in your Basic Christian community) who do you consider to be your neighbor?

I have been touched by **the heart-prints** of the lady and a group of students I mentioned in my opening sentence of this reflection because they put into practice the above mentioned scriptural passages. A beau

tiful young lady who has a job that is not necessarily highly paid, decided to celebrate her birthday this year with our orphans and vulnerable at Sunsuntilla Day Care Centre here in Mbala. As a young lady she certainly has her own urgent needs, her family needs her help, her siblings need her help, her friends and colleagues at work were probably expecting her to celebrate with them. She decided otherwise. She gazed on these forgotten ones, these less fortunate than herself, these ones that cannot pay her back, and decided to share who she is and what she has with them. She has left her **heartprint** in me!

A group of students in one of the secondary schools here also fixed their gaze on their fellow young people they see to be less fortunate than themselves in Sunsuntilla. They decided to share some of their own clothing with them. As students, they have no salary, they are dependent on other people for their own material welfare. They decided to stretch out the hand of love to them. They decided to stretch out their hand to these less fortunate than themselves. They decided to open out their arms to those they saw to be needy. They shared their widow's mite (Lk21 :2-4) with these, their fellow young people, that they see to being less fortunate than themselves. They have left their **heartprints** in me!

These ***(young lady and group of students)*** have indeed greatly touched me with their **heartprints**. Without doubt they have touched these vulnerable ones with their **heartprints**.

This gesture has kept me reflecting on this newly started journey of Advent. A season mostly taken up by all kinds of commercial activities. And many of us are expecting to receive gifts. The question many of us are asking is what will I get for Christmas from my friend/s, my husband, my wife, my lover, my parents etc? I would invite us all to reverse this question, what can I give to those who are less fortunate than I ***(look at your life, who you are, what you have; look into your wardrobe, trunk, suitcase, your garden, your farm, your poultry, your store, your account...etc)***. Is it true you are not more fortunate than any one in your Basic Christian Community, in your neighbourhood, with all those you go to Church with?

The Gospel of the First week of Advent sets the agenda for us; ... **BE ON YOUR GUARD, STAY AWAKE.....MK13:33 37**. The one who is on his/her **GUARD**, the one who is **AWAKE**, is the one who is sensitive, in the middle of the pandemic of the Corona virus, in the middle of all the poverty and the hardships of life and does not let himself/herself be caught up with or overwhelmed by with his/her own needs only, his /her own welfare and that of his/her own family. But lives in a full conscious way with concern also for those around them, those they meet on the way, in their work place, in the church etc. Those who are **ON THEIR GUARD** and **AWAKE** are those who know and are sensitive to how those around them are doing in life. The one who is on his/her **GUARD and AWAKE** is the one who knows the struggles of those around him/her. He/she is aware of the tears and needs

of those in his/her neighbourhood who are less fortunate than him/her. He/she sees and is touched by the misery in the life of others.

The person who is on their **GUARD** and is **AWAKE** is the one that recognizes how fortunate they are and is not overwhelmed by what they **LACK** but sees their abundance- (**count the many blessings/gifts in your life**). That is the person who is aware of the richness of the little things of everyday in his/her life, precisely there where the Lord has placed him/her.

Every day from morning to evening whatever our hands touch we leave our finger prints- on door knobs or door handles, cutlery, dishes, chairs, tables, books etc. There is no escape! As we touch we leave our identity. The question to ask during this season of Advent and Christmas, is how and where do I want to leave my **heartprints**? As a Christian how do I want to bridge the gap between the concern for myself, my family, my wellbeing/welfare and the well-being/ welfare of others, my neighbours, those who sit next to me in church, those in my citente (small Christian Community)?

How does my daily/weekly celebration of the Eucharist challenge me to bridge this gap? **St John Chrysostom** helps us to reflect about that when he says, **DO YOU WISH TO HONOUR THE BODY OF THE SAVIOUR? DO NOT DESPISE IT WHEN IT IS NAKED (blind, dirty, deaf and dumb, orphaned, physically disabled/challenged, mentally challenged, widowed etc). DO NOT HONOUR IT IN CHURCH WITH BEAUTIFUL AND EXPENSIVE VESTMENTS/DRESSES, GOOD HAIR DO/MAKE UP, WHILE OUTSIDE IT IS NAKED AND NUMB AND NOT A GLANCE FROM YOU.** You put your hands in your pocket! You refuse to stretch out your hand to him!!

Can you allow your daily/weekly Eucharist to invite you to **“to hold out your hand to the poor and open out your arms to the needy”**? **Prov.31:20**

Do you allow yourself to look at the physically and mentally challenged, the needy and the hungry children you see in town or on the road? Or you pass them quickly and don't even look at them because of you are uncomfortable, you are in a hurry to go to work, in a hurry to go for prayers, mass, meeting? Do you remember who your neighbour is in the parable of the Good Samaritan?

To Whom would you leave your **HEARTPRINTS** during this Advent and Christmas?

Sr. Muda

