

1.2 Life: A Gift to Share

Aim

- To understand the true nature of life as a gift of God and to understand life in the African context and life as we see it in the Bible.

Materials Required

- Several copies of the story in the procedure.

Procedure

Narrate the following story or invite five volunteers to perform a role-play based on it. Once upon a time there was a king. He was very generous. He called five of his subjects to his palace and surprised them by giving each a very precious gift. On receiving the gifts all five were amazed - but each for a different reason:

- The first subject took the gift. Looked at himself. Bowed his head and said. "No sir, I am not worthy to receive your gift. I would not know how to use it. And perhaps in receiving it I would be obliged to offer you a gift in return which I am unable to do. Your gift is now my burden. Here it is. I give it back to you."
- The second looked at the gift and said: "What a beautiful wrapper. What a beautiful ribbon. Let me put it in my show case for all to see the precious gift the King has given me."
- The third immediately took the gift, went to a corner to make sure no one was looking and no one would cast a jealous eye on what he had received. He then opened it eagerly and began to consume its contents all by himself.
- The fourth received the gift, opened it and was dissatisfied because he expected something else. "I wanted a cake and you gave me bread. I wanted a car and you gave me a bicycle. I wanted a voice to sing and you only gave me a voice to speak. "I hate your gift." And he threw the gift down, trampled on it and walked away.
- The fifth received the gift with delight. He opened the wrapper with anticipated joy, was amazed at the precious gift he beheld and then ran up in gratitude to the king and said: "I am sincerely grateful for the honour you have bestowed on me by giving me such a precious gift. For choosing me from so many - unworthy as I am. "Thank you! Thank You! Thank you!" And then in sheer delight he called the neighbours and began to share his gift with them and to tell them of the good things the king had done for him.

Discuss the story/role-play in groups with the help of the following questions:

- What is the message of this story?
- Identify the attitudes the first four recipients had on receiving the gift. Contrast these attitudes with that of the fifth recipient.
- Who do the people in the story symbolise? What does the gift given to them symbolise?
- In real life do you see yourself behaving like the first four recipients?
- If life was the gift and God was the giver what would you do to respond like the fifth recipient?
- How would you share the gifts God has given you?

Input

Life in the African context

In the African context, the Ancestors, the cosmos, the parents, and the clan pass on life to the Muntu (person). It is not an 'exclusively' physical or spiritual life, but a life "totally human... it is the whole life that it is about, the whole being, the integrity of being" Given his position within the hierarchy of all beings, as the nearest to God, the Muntu is also for them a channel and a 'cause' of life, the 'vital force', and at the same time the beneficiary of this force through them. In the course of his life and through the rites of passage as a process of his 'humanisation', he becomes depository, dispenser, and the guarantee of this life, especially as an Ancestor.

Life as we see it in the Bible

In the Old Testament, God selects a particular people called the Israelites. Time and time again they try God and test Him. But all the time His love and patience is greater than their evil hearts. The Israelites are the soil in which God plants His

seed, His word and promise. It is from them that will come the Son of God Himself. God goes further to bind them to Himself in a Covenant. On their part, they are to promise to follow and abide by this Covenant in their obeying the Law. Many times they forget the Covenant and all that it means and they begin to follow the example and beliefs of the pagan nations around them. But as they wander away, God follows them for He will not let them go. Very often, through suffering and pain, they will come to see that they do not stand alone for the mighty hand of Yahweh shields them. The growth of the Israelites in the service and love of Yahweh is a long painful process but slowly, they come to a knowledge of their God speaking to them which is greater than any knowledge ever reached by men up to that time. The seed has been sown, it has taken root and God's plan for their world and ours will show itself more clearly.

Acceptance of God's gift of Life

The role-play that has just been performed highlights five different ways we can react to the gift of life offered to us:

- a. Life is received as a burden and accepted in fear.
 - b. Life is meant to show off - only appearances matter.
 - c. Life is to be used for one's own selfish gain.
 - d. Dissatisfaction and despair in life
 - e. Life as a gift accepted with reverence, gratitude and shared with love.
 - The last of these five attitudes to life is the one a mature person cultivates. He knows that life is a gift of God and it is given freely and generously. Living a good life therefore means learning to be a good receiver and a generous giver.
 - Life is the first Gift of God to each one of us. Our parents nurtured our life but it was God who gave it to us. Therefore every human life is willed by God. We are not here by chance! It follows that every human life is of absolute value. This means that:
 - f. Human life is holy, sacred and mysterious (not even parents can explain the why and how of human life - other than the physiological explanation).
 - g. Human life is unrepeatable - each life is distinct, unique and original. Each human being is endowed with a separate identity.
 - h. Human life is purposeful - each life is a gift for a purpose. Each person ought to discover what this purpose is and strive to fulfil it.
 - i. Human life has great potential - each human being is endowed with gifts ranging from the physiological to the spiritual. The combination of talents in an individual makes the individual truly potent with creativity and power.
- For this reason, human life is to be respected and protected in all its variety (of gender, race, class, creed, culture, particular features, idiosyncrasies) and at all stages of its growth (from life in the mother's womb up to death)

Review

1. In the African context the Ancestors, the cosmos, the parents, and the clan pass on life to the Muntu (person). In the course of his life and through the rites of passage as a process of his 'humanisation', he becomes depository, dispenser, and the guarantee of this life, especially as an Ancestor.
2. Through the Israelites God's love and plan for mankind is manifested.
3. Living a good life means learning to be a good receiver and a generous giver.
4. Because life is a precious gift that we receive from God, we should respect and protect it in all its variety (of gender, race, class, creed, culture, particular features, and idiosyncrasies) and at all stages of its growth (from life in the mother's womb up to death).

Reflection

- * What are the gifts I have received?
- * In what way can I share them with others?
- * How much of my communication comes from the joy I experience in being alive?
- * Does my communication really help to "be in communion with" the author of Life?

Relevant Skills

Divide into groups. Group members are to tell each other what they know about every member (unknown self but apparent to others) and in turn each member is to tell group members what he/she knows about his/her fellow members.

Resources

BOSCOM-INDIA, 2000. 'SHEPHERDS' FOR AN INFORMATION AGE. Matunga: Tej Prasarini,

References

Belly Remy. Life, Person and Community in Africa. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa.2001.
McGrath, Michael and Nicole Gregoire. Africa: Our Way through the Bible. Britain: Redwood Books. 1997.

