**A personal reflection on the readings of Friday in the Second Week of Lent.**

My dear brother bishops, dear Clergy and Religious, my dear People of God, listening to the readings of this day, and thinking of what to say, one statement of Jesus Christ leapt into my mind: ***“Amen, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own native place”*** (Lk. 4:24). This is what I make of today's readings and message.

In the First Reading, we see how Joseph, the youngest son of Israel, was not accepted by his own brothers all because of his dream which he naively and innocently made known to his elder brothers. We see how they plotted to kill him and finally they sold him into slavery. But we know that in the end God fulfilled his plan for Joseph and his plan for (Jacob) Israel and his sons even though they had rejected their brother. In short, God will surely fulfill his promises and always. God’s will will always triumph.

In short, Joseph "played" his prophetic role before his brothers, and for that reason, he suffered rejection and betrayal of a prophet. According to the exegetes, Joseph is a "pre-figure of the Christ" who was also betrayed but for thirty pieces of silver.

In the Gospel of today too, we see Jesus Christ called to be a prophet to the religious leadership of the Chosen People of his time. Our Lord and Saviour makes it clear that a prophet, like the cornerstone, is always bound to be rejected by the builders and yet will ultimately become the keystone that holds the building together.

My dearly beloved in Christ Jesus, through the Sacrament of Baptism we are configured to Christ Jesus, as Priests, Prophets and Kings. Relevant to our reflection, therefore each one of us baptized in Christ Jesus is called to be "a prophet" and we have a prophetic role to play in whatever status we find ourselves. The Church is an institution of prophets and each one of us has a prophetic role to play in the footsteps of Christ, the Priest, Prophet and King.

Reflecting on the readings of today, therefore, who is a prophet? Like Joseph, a prophet is a dreamer, one who dreams of what God inspires in him, even when he himself does not understand his dream as something for the greater good of humanity as a whole.

Secondly, a prophet is called to give voice to God so that God can speak to him, and through him God can speak to humanity of his plans of goodness for his creation and creatures. Thirdly, the prophet does not know where God will lead him to; he relies solely on God's will even when the mission looks totally crazy; he knows that God will finally be victorious in fulfilling what good plans God has for humanity. In all this, the prophet knows that he may have to give living witness to his utterances. In humility and as an act of faith, the prophet can also say with confidence, ***"I know in whom I have placed my trust…”*** (2 Tim 1:12).

Permit me to say that the prophet is also called to be prophet both at home and abroad. The prophet, from the experience of Jesus Christ, should be conscious of the fact that he must be ready to be mocked, ridiculed, rejected and even martyred in witness to the Word of God he carries.

Let me try to do some application to the reason of our being here: In the context of New Evangelization, we bishops and priests are called not to tire of preaching the good news of Jesus Christ, in season and out of season, whether welcome or unwelcome. We however should preach it with personal conviction as well as with a sense of duty. Jeremiah will say, ***"I must say it because it is like fire burning in my entrails..."*** (Jer. 20:9). St. Paul will say, ***"Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!"*** (1 Cor. 9:16). Like Jeremiah, the Word of God should be eaten by the prophet, it will taste like honey in the mouth and bitter in the stomach; and so it must be "vomited" out to those the Word of God has been destined. The prophetic word of God cannot be held back. It is therefore our duty to preach the Good News and to preach Christ Crucified too, whether in season or out of season, whether welcome or unwelcome.

Furthermore, we as bishops are called not just to be prophetic to political and traditional leadership, but also to our fellow bishops, to our priests and religious, and to our own Church leadership. This is where the statement of Jesus Christ is forcefully true, namely that ***"no prophet is accepted in his own native place..."*** How often do we accept this truth and let it inform the performance of our roles as Shepherds, as Teachers and as High Priests? Ridicule and rejection by our own brother bishops, how ready are we to accept that? By our priests and religious? By our flock of sheep? etc? How ready are we to suffer betrayal and mockery and even “crucifixion” for the sake of Christ Jesus and his truth? How do we witness to our faith in Christ who has called us, in spite of our inadequacies which only we know fully well? How confident are we in Christ Jesus who called us out of nothing and has made us who we are? Like St. Paul, can we also declare confidently, ***"I know in whom I have placed my trust!"***

I would like to conclude this reflection on a prophet in his own native place saying that the one who has called you and me to be shepherds of his flock in the Church in West Africa has not made a mistake. He has not made a mistake in calling us, in spite of ourselves and our weakness. Furthermore, it is his Priests and Religious that he has given to us as co-shepherds over his people to help bring his sheep into the one fold. The People we lead are his, baptized in and given to drink of the same Holy Spirit like us. As prophets, how are we empowering and inviting the People of God imbued with the gifts of the Holy Spirit to share with us in the Church their gifts? The gifts of creativity and idealism of the youth? The gifts of professionalism of the lay men and women in private and public service? The gifts of the many women in our Church?

Let us remember that it is Jesus Christ who is the cornerstone rejected by the builders. He it is who invites us to take up our cross and follow him. Following Christ leads only through the dark valley of betrayal, rejection and to the peak for crucifixion at Golgotha; only in this way will it finally lead to the empty tomb of the Resurrection.

May we have the humility of the prophet to accept who we are (quite insignificant) in the grand plan of God the Father most Merciful! May Jesus Christ the Saviour and the Wounded Healer of humanity, continue to be the cornerstone of our episcopal ministry, and may He indeed fill us with his marvels as he fulfill his prophecies to and through us. Amen.

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