

WUCWO General Assembly, Dakar.
Homily Friday 19 October

“We Who First Hoped in Christ” (Eph 1, 12)

Our first reading today mentions the virtue of hope; the letter to the Ephesians describes Christians as “we who first hoped in Christ.” But what does it mean to be a hopeful person? Here is a story of a woman I knew called Mama John.

Mama John was a person who appeared to be a quiet and reserved. She often had an anxious look on her face because she had struggles at home. She and her husband ran a roadside market stall which only barely made enough money to support her family of four children. One of her sons, a teenager, seemed to be falling into serious behavioural problems. Mama John was a faithful member of her small Christian community in her parish. These small neighbourhood communities are the base level of organization of many parishes in Africa. At one stage members of her small Christian community recognized a quality of prayerfulness and integrity about Mama John and elected her to be chairperson of the small Christian community. Mama John reluctantly accepted this role, and before long the affairs of her small Christian community were being run better than ever before. Mama John provided a leadership that maintained a spirit of harmony, of prayerfulness, and an active commitment to the poor in the neighbourhood.

However, after about a year, Mama John began to recognize a problem at the parish level. She discovered that a mismanagement of parish money was being perpetrated by some members of the parish pastoral council. In spite of her natural shyness, she spoke out and denounced this. The members of the pastoral council in question, began to verbally attack Mama John. People who did not know her well began to believe these criticisms, and, for some reason, even some members of her small Christian community began to suggest that she should stand down as Chairperson. This went on for a year, but eventually, the full scale of the financial abuse came out into the open. After more than a year of enduring criticism, Mama John was fully vindicated. After all these events, I asked Mama John: what kept her going? She who seemed to be such a quiet and timid person? She gave me an answer I will never forget: she said, Father, I think about the question of going to heaven when I die. I have to follow my conscience and act in the way I think is right, even when my actions in this life seem to meet only with failure, I believe that God will put things right in the afterlife. Mama John was a woman of hope.

Today we read verses from the first chapter of the letter to the Ephesians. **“We who first hoped in Christ ... were sealed with the promise of the Holy Spirit, which is the first instalment of our inheritance toward redemption”** The expression, “first instalment” is very interesting. It explains that we do not yet enjoy the full impact of the redemption that Jesus promises us. This will come at the end of the world. At present, we continue to live in a world where evil often seems to be stronger than good. However, by the gift of the Holy Spirit, we are able to see things

that other people do not see. We hold the love of God in our hearts and we know that, eventually, this will prove stronger than all of the forces of hatred, of lies, of corruption, of poverty, of war, of suffering.

What relevance does this have for us in our General Assembly? Today we decide on the resolutions we adopt to direct the activities of our next four years. We know that we will be confronting major problems in our society. We know that the actions of WUCWO will not be able to single-handedly solve these problems. We know that our own efforts will often be imperfect, and that we may meet with failure. However, we are people of hope. We insist on applying our efforts in together to address these issues. We believe that, eventually, God will offer us the second installment of his promise and complete our poor efforts by completing the redemption of this world, of this human history. We are people of hope.

Readings

- First reading: Letter of St Paul to the Ephesians 1:11-14
- Psalm 32:1-2. 4-5. 12-13
- Gospel: Luk. 12: 1-7