

## **Zambia Oblate Bishop Chinyemba: *Your Peaceful Votes Do Count***

*Bishop Evans Chinyemba, OMI of Mongu Diocese reflects on the importance of integrity in public media and insights on the upcoming August elections in Zambia and calls for peace.*

### **Introduction**

On 11<sup>th</sup> August, we celebrate the memorial of St. Clare. St. Clare of Assisi founded the Order of the Poor Clares at San Damiano in Italy. Among other things St. Clare is upheld as a patron saint for telegraphs, telephones, television, and television writers.

As Zambia goes to the poll on the 11<sup>th</sup> August 2016, we seek St. Clare's intercession especially for those who are involved in various forms of media. On the 15<sup>th</sup> August we celebrate the Feast of the Assumption. Despite many challenges Mary faced, immediately she received the message from the Angel that she will participate in the mystery of salvation through the birth of Jesus, her faith grew stronger. Zambians have not looked back despite the challenges we have had as a country since the election campaigns began.

### **Our Experiences thus far**

As we go to the polls, our past memories become our future. Our memories tell us that in our lived experiences, the police have at times behaved unprofessionally in dealing with the political affairs of the nation. Our memories teach us that as a nation we have *conveniently* and *intelligently*, through the party in power, decided to interpret the amended constitution in order to allow Cabinet Ministers to continue being in office, using public resources for campaigns in the name of inspecting developmental projects, and in the process diminishing the political playing field. This *convenient and intelligent* way of interpreting the amended constitution questions the relevance of the various Ministerial Permanent Secretaries, which also include the Provincial Permanent Secretaries. Zambia votes aware of how Zambians have allowed the Public Media (ZNBC, Times of Zambia, Daily Mail, ZANIS, NAIS) to destroy the public media ethics and have decided to always speak for the party in power. We saw this in MMD. The opposition political parties complained about this. Promises of making the Public Media different if any of those in the opposition at that time won elections were made. As we stand, the Public Media has become worse than it was before.

For a lack of a better term, the Public Media has become an '*enemy of information*' in the course of these campaigns. The way the Public Media has behaved seems to have left the Electoral Commission of Zambia powerless knowing that the hand of government is in both institutions. The behavior of the Public Media has given birth to some online media that have become mouth pieces for the opposition political parties, at times not also giving correct news, and often painting the government in a dark brush. With all these election media challenges, the Electoral

Commission of Zambia should after this year's elections revise its Electoral Code of Conduct in as far as it relates to the media.

Banabahesu, we go to the polls aware of the people who have died and been injured during some of the violent campaigns we have had. We go to the polls with the fear of entrusting the vote of the Bill of Rights to the politicians and we question how secure will a 'Yes' vote for the referendum be in the future! We go to the polls aware of the hide and seek game The Post Newspaper and the government, through ZRA, are playing. This game aimed at silencing the private media that has '*contributed*' towards the growth of '*democracy*' in the country is undemocratic. There is a better government that could have handled The Post Newspaper and ZRA battle if at all the issue is solely tax. We go to the polls carrying on our shoulders these and other challenges.

Banabahesu, this said, we know that those in government know what things they have done well which needs to be upheld. They are also aware of the wrong things they have done that need to be changed. On the other hand, in the course of the campaigns, the opposition political parties know what positive contributions they have made to the political life of the nation. Yet, I am sure they are also aware of the unnecessary utterances they have made, which do not add value to Zambian politics and the nation as a whole.

### **Call for Peace**

What then should we do this time around? We march on in peace. We gather all that has been, search within our being and embrace the peace which Jesus Christ gave us. With this I am reminded of a song we sing in some of our Liturgies:

*Peace, perfect peace is the gift of Christ our Lord,  
Peace, perfect peace is the gift of Christ our Lord,  
Thus, says the Lord, will the world know my friends,  
Peace, perfect peace is the gift of Christ our Lord.*

We know where we have been and as a nation we will refuse to live in fear. The call for all Zambians is to arm yourselves not with a party *panga*, but with your NRC and voter's Card. Vote as if this was your last vote; and you wish to leave a good future for the generations that are coming after you. Vote by looking to the future and not to the past. Your vote and not violence is what will be count at the end of the day. Even when you have been disappointed before by the many systems we have had in the country, vote. As you line up to vote, remember the millions of Zambians who are not able to vote because they are under-age. If you put your selfishness before the future of those not yet able to vote, you shall be held responsible.

### **Conclusion and a Call for a Prayer of the heart.**

Banabaesu, Mary Our Mother is held as Queen of Peace. We entrust our prayers for peace under her care. As election campaigns enter into the final stage, offer a prayer in your heart for the following groups of people:

- Peace in the hearts of all Zambian electorate.
- Peace in the hearts and minds of all government leaders.
- Peace to be seen at work in all the politicians.
- Peace to inspire all our youths in the country.
- Peace to rule over the minds and hearts of the Electoral Commission of Zambia officials.
- Peace to move the conscious of the police and the military personnel.
- Peace to be in the hearts of all election monitors both local and international.
- Peace to be with those bent on using tribe in their campaigns and their endorsements.
- Peace to stir the hearts of those who have used public resources for their own benefits during these campaigns.
- Peace to be in the hearts of all our Zambian women who have been 'used' as dancers by all our political parties.
- Peace to stir the hearts of those who have perpetuated violence since election campaigns began.
- Peace to rule the hearts of members whose political parties will lose this year's general elections and peace as they shall call upon their members to look to the future.
- Peace to accompany the political party that shall win the presidency and in the same vein peace to reign in governance of the nation.

May God bless us and guide each one of us as we look to the future of the general elections.

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