

Homily at 12.30mass on the 26th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year B

September 27, 2009

The question that the Gospel confronts us with this morning is **“What kind of a prophet am I?”**

We are called by our baptism to be like Jesus, priest, king and prophet. So, what does it mean to be a prophet, what does a prophet do and what does prophet not do?

To most of us a prophet is one who can predict what will happen in the future. But in the biblical sense, a prophet is not necessarily one who predicts the future. **A prophet is one who acts as an intermediary between God and men and who tries to establish God’s kingdom right here on earth.** It takes great courage to be a faithful prophet because prophets often are called to announce unpleasant things to the people and people do not like to hear these things.

So, what do prophets do?

Prophets announce God’s will, go counter to the thinking of contemporary society and they do this even when they face aggressive opposition. For instance, our world today equates riches and success with

God's favour and being blest. But James speaking to us in the second reading warns us about those who have gained riches through questionable means. Let us clarify up front that **God is not against success and riches**, provided they are attained through fair and honest means. But the fact of the matter is this. Often our greed will drive us to seek riches and success even when it means compromising our principles and giving up on our ethics and values. This is what God strongly opposes. James says "The wages of labourers which you kept back cry out and reach the ears of God." We can understand this very well today. Our society is increasingly driven by the almighty bottom line and even when corporations are profitable, they seek even more profit often cutting back jobs and causing pain and hardship to families. Further with worldwide trade, work is sub-contracted to countries that pay the least wages and often the labourer is being exploited. **The prophet in such circumstances is one who draws attention to these injustices and seeks to change the flow.**

Another thing that prophets do is guide and protect those entrusted to their care. The Bible is filled with true prophets who put their lives on the line to transmit faithfully the word of God-the Jeremiahs, the Elijahs, the Elishas, the Micahs etc. Jesus warns false prophets that they deserve to have

a millstone tied around their neck and drowned. We as parents are to be true prophets to our children, conveying God-given values and transmitting our faith to them. Teachers are to be prophets to their students, Mentors are to faithfully guide those they are mentoring and pastors and those in authority are to be prophets to their community. **Each one of us who have received the spirit of God by our baptism, is called to be a prophet to those around us.** We are to be faithful transmitters of God's values by our words and by our actions.

St. Augustine in one of his writings explains the role of prophets using beautiful imagery and gives us the example of the story of the paralytic in the Gospel. When his bearers could not bring him in to the Lord, they opened the roof and lowered him down to the feet of Christ. Perhaps you wish to do this in spirit: to open the roof and to lower a paralytic soul down to the Lord. All its limbs are lifeless, it is empty of every good work, burdened with its sins, and weak from the illness brought on by its evil desires. It needs to be given new life by being brought to the feet of Jesus Christ. **So the question is "Will you be a prophet to that person?"**

Moving on, what do prophets not do? Our answer is to be found both in the Gospel and in the first reading. **Prophets do not stop other prophets from spreading God's kingdom.** When the Spirit descended on Moses and the elders in a cloud, there were two men who had remained back at the camp. The Spirit descended on them too and like Moses and the elders, these two men also began prophesying. Moses is asked to stop these two men from prophesying. Consider his response "are you jealous? Would that all of God's people were prophets and the Lord would put his spirit on them."

In the Gospel, Jesus is asked to stop someone who is casting out demons in Jesus' name, though he was not following Jesus and his disciples.

Jesus says "do not stop him. He who is not against us is for us." The Spirit of God manifests himself in many ways and many different people. Both the men who approach Moses and the disciples of Jesus want others to be stopped from doing good work just because they are not part of their group. Often, what makes us want to stop others from doing good is jealousy or exclusiveness. You are not in my group. **But Jesus clarifies that what is important is not whether someone is a member of a group or the inner circle. What is important is the person's actions. So do not stop a person**

who is doing good. The Lord is asking me to open my heart to those who do good even when they do not belong to my group.

Jesus' statement of "he who is not against us is for us" is a ringing endorsement for striving for unity. Firstly, we must strive for unity among Christians, Christians who are not Catholics. This is the movement of ecumenism. Even though there is not full unity among Christians, we are encouraged to build bridges and never stand in the way of good being done. Then there is unity between humanity, even with non Christians-Jews, Muslims, Hindus and others. **The spirit of God moves in all people and though whilst we can encourage the Spirit to move more strongly in us by responding to the promptings of the Spirit; none of us has a monopoly on the Spirit.**

Being a prophet is not easy. Jesus is calling us to a higher code as prophets. He would say, "Cut it out, Cut it out! Stop doing it", Jesus anticipates that we will say that it is hard and it is tough, and I am not strong enough. But we have a pearl of great value-our baptismal calling to be prophets, and a pearl of great value deserves that we make the sacrifice

required. And Jesus looking with love will say, “Cut it out now”. May be a modern take would be “Get Over it”.

The existential philosopher Sartre said “To live well is both difficult and possible”. To live lives focused on what gives spiritual life takes patience and determination. Yes, it is very possible for us, with the strength of the Holy Spirit, to be good prophets. **We have a number of exemplary models just in the past 100 years who have shown us so clearly that we can be good prophets and bring God’s kingdom down right now and right in the place God puts us.** Martin Luther King Jr. did that by fighting for freedom for the African Americans. Mother Teresa did it by working with the poorest of the poor in Calcutta. Jean Vanier does it by taking care of the mentally challenged at the L’arche houses all over the world. Pope Jean Paul II did it by speaking fearlessly the truth and challenging all including the youth to holiness.

As we continue with our Eucharist this morning and then return to our homes, let us carry with us our role of being prophets in our world. Let us be in touch with what God has to say to us and be courageous and bold in communicating God’s values to those entrusted to our care - our children, students and also to those around us, those we work with, our friends, our

neighbours. May the Lord strengthen us to oppose injustice when we see it and take up the cause of those who are weak. Let us build the Kingdom of God right now in our world. Our world is crying out for you and me to be modern-day prophets. Let's step up to the plate. Amen.