

Homily

July 7, 2024

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time

19:02-31:39

I hope you all had a wonderful 4th of July. It was a bit rainy, but by the evening, it was pretty good. I know because as I nestled into my bed at my usual hour, the neighborhood was erupting in what seemed like a gun battle. But it was just rockets, firecrackers – one after the other. At times it was just cacophonous. It reminded me of just what a wonderful thing it is to live in the city.

I'm serious. It's fun! You get to hear all that stuff.

It's a little bit better than when I lived in Terre Haute, when on a holiday like this, it was also guns being shot into the air. And the first time I heard that, I nestled into my bed and said, "Oh please Lord, if I'm going to die, let it not be a bullet coming from the roof." But later when we replaced the roof, we found that there were four layers of roofing. So it was like wearing a flak jacket over my head. I didn't worry after that.

We have heard of prophets today. Now very often when we think of prophets, we think of prophecy - prophecy in the sense of fulfillment in the future.

When I was thinking about this this week, I thought of some movies in which prophecy plays a major role.

- **Deep Space 9**, do you remember that? With the Orb of Prophecies laying out the future of the Bajorans.
- **The Matrix**, where Neo, who is "the One" found by Morpheus, is to bring humanity out of slavery to the Matrix.
- Or **Dune**, where the Kwisatz Haderach, or the Messiah, the one who could be in many places at once, was to rescue Dune from imperial enslavement and plunder.
- And then **The Fifth Element**, where Eelou, that strange red-headed girl who falls out of the sky into a cab, who along with the four stones representing Fire, Water, Earth and Air, is the predicted 5th Element. They are to save the earth from "The Great Evil."

Yes. Prophecies do come to us, and their fulfillment through literature.

But also, we know of Isaiah's Four Suffering Servant Prophecies, which we believe are fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. And also the Davidic lineage: the promise that David's house would always be there. Again, we know of the One, born of the house of David, Jesus Christ.

But there is more to prophets than pointing to the future. Indeed, for the most part, prophets do not do that. No. They listen and they speak.

In Chapter 1 of Ezekiel, which precedes our reading today, Ezekiel has a vision of the Lord God. Ezekiel is captive in Babylon, carried off early, before the final destruction of Jerusalem. There, he has this vision.

And then in our reading today from Chapter 2, we hear of his calling. There are three elements to his prophetic calling. 1.) The first is the Spirit comes within him. That is, a vital power coming from God, which enables the prophet to hear the Divine voice. Prophets have to listen. 2.) And then as it says, “he was put on his feet,” which is a euphemism for he was sent with authentic leadership to show the way. 3.) And then, Mission. He is to speak God’s word.

Spirit. Leadership. God’s word.

Essential to being a prophet.

Then we have Jesus and Paul, both prophets in their own time. And it is true that those three elements of being a prophet are a part of their lives. The Spirit of God comes upon them. Jesus in his baptism at the Jordan. And Paul on the road to Damascus. And they are leaders authorized by God. First, Jesus stepping forth from the waters, “This is my beloved Son. Listen to him.” And Paul rising from the road, though blind, to march toward Damascus and his mission.

They are both met with resistance. Jesus, as we know by many, even religious leaders. And Paul, whom we heard in the Second Reading, who has not only external opponents, but that thorn in his side, which tries to keep him from fulfilling his mission.

Prophets, my brothers and sisters, are needed to bring humanity to Divine Truth and right living. They are listeners, leaders, they are missioned.

We have a modern-day prophet in our midst: The Church. The Church, which is filled with the Spirit, as we have heard time and time again. At Pentecost and in the Upper Room, where the disciples were called to listen to God and to listen for God.

They are “set on their feet” by Christ, sent for authentic leadership. They are sent then, on mission to bring the Word to the world, to bring the world to right living by living out the values and behaviors consistent with the life and teaching of Christ.

In our day, some have said the Church is “countercultural.” Have you ever heard that? The late Cardinal George of Chicago changed that thinking, declaring that the Church is the prophetic voice to bring about change, that is conversion of our culture.

The Church is to speak to the culture of our time. And we, each of us, is in the culture of our time. It flows through us and moves us. We cannot say it does not affect us.

Now the Church, even with its flawed members and periodic failings, is still and yet a source of prophecy in our time. Not in the sense of predicting the future or saying there is one yet to come to fulfill the prophecy. That's already happened in Christ. And he will come again to bring about the fulness of the Kingdom.

The Church is prophetic when it lays before us the Scriptures, breaks open the Word, that we might hear. The Church is prophetic when it expounds its Traditions, with a capital "T," the teachings handed down over the centuries and restated for each generation's understanding. The Church is a prophet when it lays out the great compendium of Catholic moral teaching and Catholic social teaching and compares it what is going on in our time and in our lives --- and urges us to change.

We're going to be faced with that in the days to come. For capital punishment has been reinstated here in the state of Indiana. And the Church has spoken very clearly that it's not needed anymore. We can be safe without it.

Ultimately my brothers and sisters, parts of the wisdom shared by this prophetic voice in the Church to the world is rejected, denied and even stated as just foolishness. And this is true of the members of the Church, as well - you and me. We are not exempt from the power of our culture to lead us to say, "No. You're wrong this time."

Conversely, we hold other parts of the wisdom shared by this prophetic voice in high esteem. Even crying out for the world to see, to hear and embrace the wisdom of God through the Church's teaching.

Well, we in our imperfections and intermittent hardness of heart are each day called to change. We are to try harder to listen through the power of the Spirit given to us. We are to stand upon our feet to be authentic leaders of God's truth. We are to be missionary disciples sharing what we have come to know and believe --- all the while acknowledging that we still do not have all the answers but depend upon the faithful wisdom of others and that of the Church.

Brothers and sisters, we need prophets in our time. We all know that. We long for them. But we have a great prophet in the reality of the Church, filled with the Spirit for synodal listening and engaging, set up to be an authentic leader for the world. A community of believers sent on mission to the world. Let us pray that it will always be so.