

Homily
January 28, 2024
4th Sunday in Ordinary Time
21:21 – 32:32

Two weeks ago, we reflected upon a simple sentence: ***Speak Lord, for your servant is listening.***

And we reflected upon that which we are encouraged to do on a regular basis. To say that phrase and to use it to calm ourselves as we begin to pray or reflect.

I have found it very effective these last two weeks, saying that before I begin Morning Prayer, or the Office of Readings or whatever. ***Speak Lord, for your servant is listening.*** It normalizes into a moment of intimacy.

Prophets are called to begin their lives as prophets with, ***“Speak Lord, your servant is listening.”*** It is true. Two weeks ago, it was Samuel who was one of the judges. He had a prophetic role, but he was the leader of the people before the kings. In fact, he was the one who anointed the first kings. We know he listened, and the Lord commissioned him.

Now we tend to think of prophets as predictors of the future. But when we look at the role of the prophet in the Scriptures, that’s not what it’s about. A prophet is one who instructs the people, who helps to cast a course of direction for their lives - relying upon the Covenant of Moses in the Old Testament, proclaiming, “This is how we are to live this Covenant.”

Such a prophet must listen to God and await God’s instruction and direction. For God is the source of true prophecy and the true authority therein. God’s Covenant is bedrock, part of this instruction to and through the prophet. The prophet must have that as the bedrock.

Now, our First Reading is about prophecy, successors of Moses. There’s a whole section of Deuteronomy that addresses the role of kings and priests. First, they are to serve the people in their roles rooted in the Covenant. And then, immediately before our reading, Moses is told to tell the people to avoid seers and soothsayers and diviners of all the religious cultures around you.

Prophets are not such diviners. No. Prophets are the spokespersons for the Lord. They are to speak of the fulfillment of the Covenant.

But we also know from the Old Testament that prophets are not very popular people. That's true then, and it's true now. When prophets speak, very often we squirm. But their role is to speak through and for God to instruct and direct. And there are no exceptions among God's people. From king to child, all are to listen.

We believe that the ultimate prophet is the Lord Jesus. He is the one who speaks with authority, as we heard in the Gospel. He has this intimate relationship with God. In the Gospels we hear time and time again that he goes off to pray. To spend time in prayer. To listen to what the Father would have him do in his time among his people. He truly, as we hear again and again, instructs and gives direction.

We notice in the Gospel reading that he doesn't do it like the Scribes. The Scribes were the lawyers. They were the ones who knew all of the rules. And the Pharisees, though not mentioned, we hear of them a lot. They were the law enforcers.

But they didn't speak like Jesus did. No. Jesus spoke from the Covenant. He spoke the truth and then it was backed up by his actions, as we see when he cast out the unclean spirit in the Gospel.

And of course, as all the prophets, he wasn't very popular with the religious leaders. He wasn't popular with the politicians of his time – the kings and the Romans. He came into conflict again and again because folks didn't want to listen to what he had to say.

Prophecy, my brothers and sisters, did not stop with Jesus, his resurrection. Prophecy yet goes on. We know that Peter and Paul, themselves, though they were apostles and preachers and teachers, gave direction and instruction. Just read the Acts of the Apostles. It's constant throughout. Their role was prophetic.

And that authority that they had was passed on to others. Ultimately to the body of believers, the Church. Church prophecy is more than teaching of doctrine, though doctrine is important. The prophetic role of the Church is to help us know how to live the Covenant we have in Christ Jesus. The prophetic role of the Church sets direction for us, instructs us how to live.

There were many prophets in the Old Testament, were there not? Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Obadiah, etc. We too, in our own time, have seen a plethora of prophetic voices in the Church. Dietrich Bonhoeffer during World War II, clearly spoke out against what was going wrong in Europe. He was prophetic – not only as a Lutheran, but as a Christian.

Doroty Day, of our own time in the Catholic Worker movement. Thomas Merton, a great spiritual guide. Martin Luther King, Jr., whose message was clearly rooted in the Gospels. And then among our own – Pope John the XXIII, Pope Paul VI, Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict and now, Pope Francis -- each prophetically speaking, in their time of history, through their listening in that moment to the specific circumstances of the world, giving us instruction and direction.

And guess what! We don't agree with all of them! Do we? Just like our ancestors, some we want to listen to and some we don't. But I am convinced they all listened to the Lord before they spoke.

In a few moments we are going to enroll our First Holy Eucharist students in their preparation for First Holy Eucharist. And that takes root from their baptism. And at their baptism, as well as ours (I know most of you don't remember yours, whether it was in Spanish or English) there's a point when the Chrism is placed upon our forehead that it says, "As Christ was anointed priest, prophet and king, so may you live always as a member of his body, sharing everlasting life." Thus, my brothers and sisters, these children, along with us, have a prophetic role – especially parents and teachers. For are we not to listen to the Lord, show them the way and then help to instruct and direct?

How are we going to live this gift we have in Christ Jesus?

Speak Lord for your servant is listening.