

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Cycle B-2024

In our first reading from the Book of Numbers, Moses proclaimed, “Would that all the people of the Lord be prophets!” Moses deepest desire ultimately became true in the sacrament of Baptism in which we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Through Baptism, we all come to personally share in the prophetic ministry of Jesus. Exercising this ministry involves the two-fold dimensions of personal lifestyle and the words that we speak. We give witness through our lifestyle in how we live and how we love God and other people. We also give witness to Christ through both the affirming and challenging words that we speak. On the affirming side, we speak words of God’s love and mercy that give hope, and God’s abundant grace which provides His help. We speak words of encouragement to those who are suffering, confused, broken, discouraged, and riddled with guilt and shame. On the challenging side, we speak God’s truth that calls us to ongoing change, growth, and evolution as we strive to turn away from

our sins and conform our lives more fully to the will of God.

In today's culture, we are called to speak the mind and heart of Jesus Christ and His Church on sensitive and emotional topics such as sexuality, marriage, gender identity, the dignity of the unborn, and a variety of social justice issues. The challenging side of our prophetic ministry will usually not win us any popularity contests. It may at times get us temporarily or permanently blocked, canceled, or ghosted, by people in our lives, including family and friends. In these painful moments, it is good to remind ourselves that we were not put on this earth to win any popularity contests, even though it sure feels good. The only popularity contest that ultimately matters is that we and our lives are pleasing and acceptable in the sight of God. We do that through a life of intimacy with Christ and faithfulness to Him.

When circumstances call for us to speak some inconvenient truths, may we do so from a place of love, respect, gentleness, and kindness, even if someone becomes resistant and belligerent towards us. When we are exercising this prophetic ministry, it is always good to check our ego and a spirit of judgement at the door. Our interior motivation is meant to be guided and

illuminated by the love of God and the person we are interacting with.

Our second reading from the Book of James reminds us that we are called to speak prophetically about the human tendency to worship money and material possessions. This can become a false god that many people build that whole purpose, identity, and dignity around. As the old cliché states: “You can’t take it with you when you go.” I would add that it can negatively affect where we end up going when we die.

For the sake of clarification, money and material possessions are not inherently evil. In fact, they are fundamentally good. They are a gift from God. We make them a source of evil in our lives when we make them the overwhelming passion and priority in our lives, especially when we place them above God. Our deepest identity is not meant to be grounded in “what we have” but in “who we are” and “whose we are.” We are none other than the beloved daughters and sons of God. These makes us and everyone priceless in the eyes of God. Even though we may have worked hard for everything we have, it would have been impossible without God providing us with the necessary opportunities, health, inner drive, intelligence,

personality, and giftedness. “But for the grace of God go I.”

In the Christian life, the question is not just about how much we can hoard for ourselves and our families, even though we are called to be wise and good stewards. It is also about how we can be voluntarily generous in paying it forward to others who have a legitimate need of body, mind, heart, and soul. With a discerning heart, God calls us to embrace both being good stewards and being generous. In fact, we are good stewards by being generous in sharing God’s blessings. If our life circumstances prevent us from doing it with money and material possessions, we can do it by being generous in sharing our time and talent.

Finally, our Gospel reading reminds us that an important dimension of our prophetic ministry involves providing good example. The Gospel specially focuses on witness to children, yet we are called to be a “guiding light” and a “breath of fresh air” to all the children of God, regardless of their chronological age. Questions to consider: How can we protect and promote the innocence and goodness of all people? Do our lives inspire others to draw closer to Christ or do we

scandalize them in a manner that hurts their relationship with Jesus and His church?

As we grow in our intimacy with Jesus Christ there can be a tendency for us to mourn or to experience overwhelming shame and guilt about the loss of our original innocence. This usually centers around our past life and faith choices. I have some good news. We can experience a second innocence. This second innocence is even more pleasing to God because it is freely and purposively chosen. Both intellectually and from the heart, we chose to deepen our relationship with Jesus and do His will in our lives, again and again. We celebrate and embrace Him as the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Once we humbly address our past sins with the Lord, He no longer holds them against us in the present and future. As the Scriptures joyfully proclaims, “He casts them behind His back and remembers them no more.” God has a short memory concerning our sins if we keep coming before Him in a spirit of humility and sincerity.

As we live out our own prophetic ministry, the Scriptures remind us that there are two types of prophets. They are true prophets and false prophets. It is interesting to note that the false prophets were often

beloved because they told people what they wanted to hear instead of what they needed to hear. The true prophets had quite a different experience. We can be a combination of these two at different moments or periods in our lives. It would be helpful to habitually ask ourselves: Am I proclaiming my own gospel? One that I have created in my image and likeness? Am I simply proclaiming the gospel of my family, friends, peers, and culture? Am I proclaiming a gospel that changes according to who I am with, out of a desire for acceptance, self-preservation, or personal benefit? Do I habitually remain silent when I feel compelled to speak out? Or am I proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ as revealed in the Sacred Scriptures, church teaching, and the lives of the saints? I'll give you one guess on which option makes us true prophets of God. Our honest answers to these questions will reveal where we presently are in our prophetic ministry. If we open our minds and hearts, Jesus Christ will show us how we can exercise our prophetic ministry in a manner that contributes to our sanctification and salvation, and that of other people. That is the whole focus and purpose of our prophetic ministry.