

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year C)  
(Jeremiah 1:4-5.17-19 / Luke 4:21-30)  
31.01.2016

Dear brothers and sisters,

Today's gospel passage is the continuation of last Sunday's. Do you remember last Sunday's gospel...? Last Sunday, we heard that, at the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus went into the synagogue of Nazareth. There, he spoke graciously and with authority, the authority of God himself. In today's gospel passage, we have just heard that those who listened to Jesus reacted first with wonder and admiration, but quickly they found his words unacceptable and pure pretence, because they knew Him. Jesus was just one of them, the son of Joseph the carpenter, nothing more. What pretension on his behalf to speak as if he shared God's authority, as if he was God himself! Seeing their obstinate refusal, Jesus rebuked them with the same authority: **"No prophet is ever accepted in his own country."** And he gave examples from the Scriptures: The prophet Elijah was sent to a widow at Zarephath, a Sidonian town, and not to a widow in Israel. The prophet Elisha cured a Syrian leper, Naaman, and not one of the many lepers in Israel. Yes, brothers and sisters, how true it is that a prophet is rarely accepted among his own people. These words of Jesus, which were hard to hear for his listeners, remain true, relevant and hard to listen to for us today. We shall come back to this point later on in our reflection.

Perhaps it would be good to begin by reminding ourselves what a prophet is in the Bible. A prophet is not above all someone who foretells the future. Obviously this can happen, but this is not of the essence of a prophetic ministry. A prophet is someone who speaks on behalf of God. A prophet is appointed by God to tell the world what God asks him or her to relay. A prophet is someone who reveals who God is to the world. A prophet is someone who reveals God's will to the people. He or she is God's spokesperson.

Spontaneously, we think that a prophet is someone exceptional, distant, isolated, and flawless who receives something to tell us from a distant and mysterious God. This leads us to imagine that we have to leave our daily life and go far away from home to find and listen to a prophet. We think of John the Baptist preaching in the desert. Each one of us can probably furnish the name of some remarkable person whom he or she considers to be a prophet today. We imagine someone who is a very well known preacher or an impressive writer, someone who touches the hearts of many with his words, to be a prophet.

There is nothing wrong with that, but this is only partially true. There are more prophets among us than that. We believe that our God is not a distant God. He promised us to be with us forever. And indeed He is with us in all that we think, do or say.

We also believe that, through the sacrament of baptism, we are all called to exercise our baptismal priesthood, but we can forget other aspects of our baptismal identity. By our baptism we are called to participate in Christ's mission as priest, **prophet** and King. Through our baptism, we are all prophets, each one of us is a prophet. We all have a prophetic mission to fulfil.

The point to grasp is that God speaks to us through one another. This is a stumbling block for many! If we are honest, we have to confess that very often it is difficult for us to accept that God speaks to us through those with whom we live and whose flaws we know only too well. Who are they who pretend to speak to us on behalf of God? How can God rely on them to speak to us? Who are these people who send us back an image of ourselves that we don't like? But what if that image was a twinkle of the Lord's eye, an unexpected divine grace suddenly offered to us?

Our prophetic vocation does not mean that we are flawless, perfect. It does not mean that we get everything right and always! Far from it! We are all sinners and limited. But we were created in the image and likeness of God. Through our baptism, we became inhabited by the Holy Spirit, one in Christ, adoptive children of our heavenly Father. As such, it happens that God works and speaks through us, as we are.

If only we believed this! If we were convinced that the Lord speaks to us through one another: through the members of our families, of our communities, of our Churches, then our regard upon one another would change quickly for the better and the face of the world would change too. But very often, we see the straw in the eye of our brother or sister and forget or ignore the beam in our own eye. When we do that, we miss the opportunity to listen to what the Lord wants to tell us through others around us. On the contrary, we should be filled with respect for one another; we should be attentive and listen to one another. When we judge and condemn our brothers and sisters, when we have no trust in them, we forget the presence of the Lord in their hearts. We forget that the Lord desires to speak to us through them, even in the midst of the messiness of the life we share.

To recognize, see and listen to the Lord present in our neighbour is a major theme of the gospel and of the Rule of St Benedict. St Benedict invites us to recognize the Lord in the Abbot, in the sick brother or sister, in the young and in the old, in the guest who knocks at the door of the monastery, in each one of our brothers and sisters with whom we live, or who cross our path. If instead of judging, condemning or ignoring others, we listened to them as potential prophets sent to us by God, our lives would change for the better, desolation would change into consolation, darkness into light, depression into hope, fear into trust, seeds of death into seeds of life.

There is an invitation to believe in our prophetic mission, our own and that of our fellow Christians, rooted in our common and unique baptism. This is true in our families, in our communities of life, in our Churches.

This is also true with our brothers and sisters of other Christian denominations. Each denomination brings something special to the mystery of the Church. Speaking about Christian brothers and sisters of others denominations, Pope Francis wrote in his apostolic exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel*: "We can learn so much from one another. It is not just about being informed about others, but rather about reaping what the Spirit has sown in them which is also meant to be a gift for us".

Even people of other faiths, or of no faith, can teach us a lot about God, about self-giving love, for example, self-living love which, we know it, is nothing other than who God is.

This does not mean that all we can say, or all that others say, that everything we hear is from God, but it does mean that God can speak and in fact does speak to us in so many ways through those around us.

Let us ask the Lord for the grace to truly believe in our prophetic mission, our own prophetic mission and that of our fellow human beings! May we relate to one another with respect and humility, with a listening heart always longing for the Lord, ever ready to recognize and welcome Him when He comes to us under so many guises!