

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)
(Deuteronomy 18:15-20 / Mark 1:21-28)
28.01.2018
We are all prophets

The prophet promised by the Lord in the book of Deuteronomy is Christ. The ultimate prophet who not only speaks the Word of God but who is the Word of God made flesh is Jesus Christ.

In his great generosity Jesus shares with us who he is: by our baptism we all have been made prophets. The Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us that “the holy People of God shares in Christ's prophetic office” (n. 785).

What does it mean for us to be prophets?

Among the many things which should be said in this regard, I would like to mention some essential characteristics which should be found in each one of our lives.

A prophet is somebody who speaks for somebody else, he or she is a spokesperson. So the first requirement for us who want to be the Lord's prophets is that we listen to the Lord. We must be attuned to the way the Lord thinks and acts in order to be able to proclaim to others the Lord's words and will. We are not supposed to speak according to our whim, or out of fear or because we think we are right, but because God has spoken to us and because we have heard him speak.

It is their intimacy with the Lord which makes true prophets. They know when to speak and act, what to do or say. Their words or deeds may be challenging, encouraging or even disconcerting, but they are always life-giving, they always reveal God's deep longing for each one of us: “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (Jn 10:10).

So as prophets, we have to ask ourselves if our lives, our words and deeds, are about life or if they are about judgement, and all doom and gloom.

In our world today, we have to be true to what we believe, to the faith which has been handed on to us by the apostles, yet we have to remember that the truth for us is a living person, Jesus Christ, it is him whom we must share with the world, he who is the source of life.

The second essential characteristic of our prophetic ministry is its visibility. In the paragraph already quoted, the Catechism of the Catholic Church considers that the prophetic ministry is best expressed when the whole People of God “becomes Christ's witness in the midst of the world” (n. 785).

Each one of us is expected to exercise a prophetic ministry in one way or another. Obviously we are not all called to be Saint Teresa of Calcutta, Martin Luther King, or Bl. Oscar Romero. Most of us will never be named on TV or in a newspaper. Most of us will spend our lives in the same environment and with people we know all too well. However the prophetic dimension of our baptism implies that we make our Christian life visible to others.

I do not mean that we have to advertise our faith, what we do and say. Yet we have the duty to proclaim and to make known the Lord, his Gospel, its message and values, because we believe that they are life-giving. Our prophetic ministry must be exercised with wisdom and love but we cannot remain silent when the Gospel urges us to speak, and when our brothers and sisters in humanity long for true life.

St John Paul II sums up the challenge in the following terms: “(Christians) share in the prophetic office when they let the newness and the strength of the Gospel shine forth in all fields of their life.” (*Message*, 30.05.1997). In society and in the Church, there are many occasions for all of us to let “the newness and the strength of the Gospel shine forth”.

The problem may be that some will refuse our witness, contradict our values, or simply ignore them.

In all these cases we should neither keep quiet nor shout louder, neither answer violence with violence, whether it is verbal or physical, nor withdraw and wall ourselves up.

Our prophetic witness requires courage and perseverance. Not a courage rooted in our own strength or convictions but in God and his Spirit at work in and around us.

We are not prophets for ourselves or an institution but for others. In order to be prophets we need to be very attentive to what is happening around us, to what people are going through. Prophets decipher and interpret the signs of the times and engage themselves in trying to find a response to all the situations which need to be changed.

Pope Francis considers that prophets are called “to create networks of solidarity which can expand to embrace and transform society.” (*Homily*, 16.01.2015)

Moses’ complaint is still valid today: “If only God’s people were prophets!” (Num 11:29) If only we were more faithful to the prophetic dimension of our baptism! If only we were less lazy and complacent with all that hurts and disfigures humanity and creation, society and Churches!

St Paul reminds us that we have not been given “a spirit of cowardice but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline” (2Tim 1:7). The Spirit of power, love and self-discipline is what we should rely on as we long to see our society and our Churches reflecting more brightly the beauty of God.