

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time
(Ezekiel 2:2-5 / Mark 6:1-6)
04.07.2021
Prophet

Dear brothers and sisters,

If we were asked out of the blue: “what is a prophet?”, probably we would spontaneously answer something along these lines: a prophet is a wise person whose words are inspiring and life-giving; or again a prophet is a holy person who speaks to us on God’s behalf. We would perhaps think of the prophet either as someone distant, mysterious, a person whose words are few, or as someone passionate and convincing, a great preacher. We would probably have to add then that usually prophets don’t live in our midst; we have to travel far to meet with them!

As Christians, we believe that Jesus is the prophet par excellence. We believe that he is the prophet who came into the world to reveal to us who God is and what God’s will for us amounts to.

In the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of the Council Vatican II – *Lumen Gentium*, the Light of the Nations – we read: “Christ is the great prophet who proclaimed the kingdom of the Father both by the testimony of his life and by the power of his word. Until the full manifestation of his glory, he fulfils this prophetic office, not only through the hierarchy who teach in his name and by his power, but also through the laity” (n. 35).

This text underlines that Christ, the great prophet, continues to speak to us today not only through the hierarchy of the Church, that is to say those who were ordained to sacred ministries: bishops, priests and deacons, but also through the laity, that is to say each one of us who by our baptism were incorporated into Christ and are inhabited by the Holy Spirit. In other words, this text underlines that, by virtue of our baptism, we all share in the prophetic mission of Christ. We are all prophets!

We are reminded by the Second Vatican Council that the Church is not a pyramidal institution, where inspiration and teaching would come only from the hierarchy, but a “synodal” body. The Church is a people, the people of God, made of all those who were baptised in Christ and have received the gift of the Holy Spirit. Inspiration and wisdom are given by the Holy Spirit to each member of the people of God who are all called to walk together, listening to and speaking with each other. This is a first outline of what we call a synodal Church. We have to be vigilant not to reduce the Church to its hierarchy, to the ministerial priesthood (bishops, priests and deacons). The Church is constituted by the gathering around Christ of all those who were baptised. This is what we call the common priesthood of the faithful. Together, we are a people of priests! The hierarchy is part of the people of God, not apart from or above the people of God. Baptism is our common ground. Before becoming an ordained minister, the candidate has to be baptised and to be a member of the people of God. The hierarchy is at the service of the people of God. Its service is one of presidency, teaching, discernment and communion. The hierarchy without the laity does not make sense. This is an important point to make at the time when Pope Francis is

seeking tirelessly to lead the Church on the synodal way, which is the ancient and most traditional approach of the Church rekindled at the Council Vatican II.

The difficulty of the contemporaries of Jesus to accept His prophetic ministry because He was one of them is the same difficulty that we experience today. It is often difficult for us to accept that the Holy Spirit is speaking to us through those with whom we live and whom we know only too well. They are not perfect! How the Holy Spirit could speak to us through them? If what they say to us was said by someone we don't know or by someone belonging to some sort of hierarchy, I suspect it would be easier for us to receive it. But the truth is that all those who were baptised in Christ are inhabited by the Holy Spirit. God can speak to us through any one of them. This requires of us humility and respect for all of those with whom we live and who share our faith – all those who were baptised – and even also for all our brothers and sisters in humanity who were created in the image and likeness of God and through whom God communicates something about himself to us. This does not mean that everything they say comes from God. Far from it! But this does not mean either that God cannot speak to us through them. He can! The truth is that Christ speaks to us through one another. We are all potential prophets for one another!

A prophet is someone who sees the world as God sees it. A prophet is someone who speaks God's will for his people. It can be a comforting word. It can be a challenging one. It is often an invitation to let go our own short-sighted vision in order to welcome God's perspective on the world and upon our personal lives. This is a way of freedom! But, at the same time, this is a way which cannot but be crucifying at certain hours!

This is the perspective of the synodal way of the Church which invites us to listen to one another so that we may discover together the way forward to advance the coming of the kingdom in today's world. In this process, we need the service of the hierarchy, the bishops and their collaborators. They have a mission to teach us; to remind us of some dimensions of the full picture which we could ignore or forget; they have for vocation to preserve the unity of the Church, and to select from among what we propose the priorities for the Church's mission in the here and now.

Let us give thanks to the Lord who has made of all of us a people of prophets called to listen carefully and respectfully to one another so that we may walk together with the help our leaders in the faith.