

20th Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)
(Jeremiah 38:4-6.8-10 / Luke 12:49-53)
17.08.2025
Prophets

Our two biblical readings give us a glimpse of what it entails to be a prophet: Jeremiah is shown to suffer persecution because of his preaching and Jesus highlights the fact that division is one of the consequences of his prophetic ministry.

The words and the deeds of these two men, the way they envisioned their answer to God's call as prophets concerns us because, as the Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us (cf. n. 1268), by our baptism we have a share in Christ's prophetic ministry, each one of us has been anointed to be a prophet.

Concretely what does it mean for us to be prophets?

Pope Francis once gave this definition of the prophet's mission: "A prophet is the one who, by virtue of Baptism, helps others read the present under the action of the Holy Spirit." (*Angelus*, 02.07.2023)

So our mission is to help one another to discern the work of the Spirit in our daily lives. We find the same idea in St John XXIII's writings (cf. *Humanae Salutis* 4, *Pacem in Terris* 126) and in the teaching of the 2nd Vatican Council where we are reminded that one of the missions confided to the whole Church is to read properly "the signs of the times."

According to Elie Wiesel, this discernment process has two dimensions. First, "since the viewpoint of the prophet and the viewpoint of society are in conflict, the prophet's speech will involve *denunciation*," but, Elie Wiesel adds "it is not enough just to denounce. Along with denunciation must go *annunciation*. There must be annunciation of new hopes and possibilities, the presentation of positive alternatives. If despair must be denounced, then something like hope must be announced." (quoted in Brown, p. 214)

Denunciation of despair and annunciation of hope.

To denounce does not consist in yelling at people because they are supposedly wrong, it is not to make them feel guilty because of their mistakes or to shame them with judgmental and condemnatory speeches. For us to denounce despair means that we are attentive to challenge, in our lives and in the way our society functions, all that leads to desperation and anguish, all that darkens the horizon, closes doors and builds up walls. Our mission is to oppose the political leaders who stir up fears and use them for the promotion of inhumane ideologies and the religious leaders who turn into prophets of gloom and who, as St John XXIII noticed, "are lacking in sufficient prudence and judgment in their evaluation of events." (*Opening Address Vatican II*, 12.10.1962)

We must be very aware that our prophetic ministry of denunciation must be accomplished according to St Paul's recommendation: "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. (...) Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger." (Eph 4:2-3. 31)

Gentleness and patience do not mean that we deny the reality of sin in and around us, that we speak pious words and promise "pie in the sky". Rather we should keep our eyes fixed on the Lord who through his work within us "is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or imagine." (Eph 3:20)

Here may lie two stumbling-blocks which prevent us from fulfilling our mission as prophets. First we lack trust in the Lord and do not have hope, then, we realise that our mission does not consist only in denouncing despair but in announcing “new hopes and possibilities and positive alternatives” and moreover, as Elie Wiesel wrote, the challenge for us is to “embody the alternative: opt for justice, love your enemy, act compassionately.” (Id.)

As persons and as communities, do we embody hope in such a way that people want to embrace it? As persons is the way we live, or the manner by which we relate to strangers and migrants consistent with our claim to be Christians?

Do the decisions we make for our lives and the lives of our countries offer new possibilities and positive alternatives to those who are on the margins, those who do not have access to proper education or health care?

More largely, in our Churches, is it clear to us that we cannot be credible when we speak of peace, respect for life and justice if we do not embody these Gospel values in our daily lives and in the structures of our religious institutions?

The Spirit of prophecy is within us. If we choose to ignore its promptings or to silence its voice then we are bound to fail in our mission. How then can we be the light of the world (cf. Mt5:13), the light of hope in the darkness of our personal lives and in the midst of the dramatic situations of violence, starvation, and destruction which wound our common humanity?

Pope Francis reminded us that “the prophet acts as a sentinel.” (*Letter*, 19.03.2024) “Prophecy makes us capable of (...) building meekly, yet resolutely God’s kingdom.” (*Prayer Meeting and Angelus*, 06.11.2022)

May all of us be sentinels of hope, may we not allow our brothers and sisters in humanity to be robbed of their hope. May our words and deeds contribute to the building of God’s kingdom of hope.

St Paul’s words resonate through the centuries and should inform our prayer today: “Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy.” (1 Co 14:1)