

For Sunday, July 8, 2018

The Courage to Proclaim

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/070818.cfm>

Ezekiel 2:2-5

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Mark 6:1-6

The hope of the Christian message — once an inspiration to the world over — is increasingly viewed with doubt and suspicion. Perhaps belief in God, in the meaning of our male and female, in the person-hood of embryos ... perhaps these are the real oppressors. Our cultural confusion and tumult results in [offenses against human dignity](#). Death comes to the womb and to [public places](#). Even people of good will and deep faith are divided on the best ways to handle society's ills and develop just governing policies.

For many believers, the weariness with “culture wars” makes a quiet retreat all the more appealing. If the problems of the world only multiply, what use is little old me? And yet... *“At this stage of history, the liberating message of the Gospel of Life has been put into your hands...now more than ever, in a world that is often without light and without the courage of noble ideas, people need the fresh, vital spirituality of the Gospel...this is no time to be ashamed of the Gospel!”* [These words of St. John Paul II at the 1995 World Youth Day celebration](#) are as relevant now as they were over 20 years ago. And in this Sunday's readings, we rediscover our common calling.

By baptismal grace, we share in the threefold mission of Christ: priest, prophet, and king. We are called to offer our lives (priestly mission) and — by our love and labors — sanctify society (kingly mission). The prophets are not the far-seers. They're not the highly educated analysts nor the fringe doomsday heralds. They are us. We are invited to participate in the mighty work of God by proclaiming His saving power. This Sunday's readings give us a sobering sense of what we're in for.

In the First Reading, Ezekiel receives his next prophetic mission. “Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites, rebels who have rebelled against me. Hard of face and obstinate of heart are they to whom I am sending you.” At this summer's family reunion, perhaps it's easier to keep our faith quiet. When a controversial topic emerges at the water cooler, perhaps it's easier to quickly change the subject or slowly extricate yourself from the situation. But these might be the precise situations to which you are called to love! Bring to mind the conversation you'd dread the most. Bring to mind the person with whom you're most fearful to share your faith. Surrender it to God. Perhaps you're the “prophet” God wants to send with truth and love.

But brace yourself for a tough time. In the Gospel, Jesus returns to Nazareth after a stint of itinerant preaching. The villagers look down their noses at the carpenter's son, and “he was not able to perform any mighty needs there.” Jesus was more than a prophet — he was the fulfillment of them all! And even he was rejected by those to whom he was sent. He was — and is — rejected by those he loves. Our words or deeds can unsettle those who think or act differently. We're in good company. “And they took offense at him.” Jesus himself was not exempt.



Should we be poorly received, two reactions are common. One was mentioned earlier: retreat. “Well, I’m never doing that again!” The other is to retrench. “That’s how you’re going to treat me? Just you wait until I come back...” As we lean into our role of prophetic love-givers and truth-tellers, we shouldn’t be surprised to be confronted with our own darker side. Does our moral conviction give into self-righteousness and pride? Does our attempt to argue mean we forget to see and listen to the real person in front of us? We would do well to remember another story of Jesus [about a splinter and a beam](#). While God has done — and is doing — a great many good works in our lives, we need to be honest about our own flaws.

St. Paul does this masterfully in the Second Reading. Paul is one of the greatest saints of the Church. Yet here he is, honest about his flaws and desperate for the grace of God. “*A thorn in the flesh was given to me...to beat me... Three times I begged the Lord about this, that it might leave me.*” St. Teresa of Avila supposedly once quipped, “Lord, if this is the way you treat your friends, it’s no wonder you have so few!” Trial will come. But St. Paul doesn’t share his weakness for the sake of pity, or even pride at over-coming a difficulty under his own power.

“[Jesus] said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.’ I will rather boast most gladly of my weaknesses, in order that the power of Christ may dwell within me...I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and constraints for the sake of Christ.”

How is Jesus calling you this week?

Anna Carter

PRAYER

Heavenly Father,
Pour forth your Holy Spirit to inspire me
with these words from Holy Scripture.
Stir in my soul the desire to renew my faith
and deepen my relationship with your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ
so that I might truly believe in and live the Good News.
Open my heart to hear the Gospel
and grant me the confidence to proclaim the Good News to others.
Pour out your Spirit, so that I might be strengthened
to go forth and witness to the Gospel in my everyday life
through my words and actions.
In moments of hesitation, remind me:
If not me, then who will proclaim the Gospel?
If not now, then when will the Gospel be proclaimed?
If not the truth of the Gospel, then what shall I proclaim?
God, our Father, I pray that through the Holy Spirit
I might hear the call of the New Evangelization
to deepen my faith, grow in confidence to proclaim the Gospel,
and boldly witness to the saving grace of your Son,
Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.
Amen.

—Prayer for the New Evangelization, [USCCB](#)

LPI

2875 S. James Drive • New Berlin, WI 53151
(800) 950-9952 ext. 2469

Send email address changes to: lpiconnections@4LPi.com

To opt out of receiving this reflection, contact: lpiconnections@4LPi.com

Copyright ©2018, LPI. All rights reserved.