

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time | For Sunday, February 3rd, 2019

The Pundits & The Prophets

Written by Anna Carter

Jeremiah 1:4-5, 17-19

1 Corinthians 13:4-13

Luke 4:21-30



Jeremiah is called from birth. Jesus proclaimed it in his hometown of Nazareth 2,000 years ago. Barack Obama announced it in 2007 in his native state of Illinois ... or so I heard in a recent homily! In last Sunday's Gospel, Jesus proclaimed he was the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecies about the Messiah — the hope of his people. With 2020 looming on the horizon, it would appear that we will have no shortage of would-be prophets and Messiahs, at least in the political sense. If it's not the candidates, it's the pundits who examine, critique, and expose. There will be plenty who claim a message of earthly salvation. But are these really prophets? Who is sent today and how?

Throughout Scripture, the prophets are God's "mouthpiece," so to speak. They utter words of truth, offer calls to repentance, and proclaim the hope that awaits those who trust in God. However, while they may remark on the events of this earth, their message transcends it.

Today's Scripture readings are concerned with this notion of prophets. In the first reading, we see Jeremiah reminded that he has been called from birth to send a message of deliverance to the Hebrew people. But the great stronghold Jeremiah speaks of never quite materializes in an earthly kingdom for long. By the time Jesus is born, the land of the Hebrews is part of the Roman Empire. Jesus will announce that the words of prophets like Jeremiah and Isaiah don't correspond to a nation-state you can mark out on a map, but are fulfilled in a spiritual reality. In today's Gospel, he accentuates this by pointing out past miracles done in unexpected places.

This isn't to say that injustices in the world ought not to be fought. In our complicated and complex world, there is no shortage of sins in recent headlines: [human trafficking during the Super Bowl](#), [expanding abortion laws](#), [lasting damage to our natural resources](#). Many of us will be called to a particular issue, to learn what we can, and to advocate, volunteer, or give financially in response. But the Christian prophetic role is more than that.

Through our baptism, we share in Christ's mission. We, too, have his roles of *priest*, *prophet*, and *king*. In [his document on the lay faithful](#), St. John Paul II describes the prophetic role:

"The lay faithful are given the ability and responsibility to accept the Gospel in faith and to proclaim it in word and deed, without hesitating to courageously identify and denounce evil [...] to allow the newness and the power of the Gospel to shine out everyday in their family and social

life, as well as to express patiently and courageously in the contradictions of the present age their hope of future glory.”

As prophets, we don't need to give stirring speeches from soapboxes or mountaintops. We do, however, need to live lives faithful to the Gospel. We need to love well on this earth, while recognizing that it's not the end of the story. We do that uniquely and personally as we are.

It can be easy to become overwhelmed by the sheer number of the world's problems, not to mention those of our own family and community. To take on all of that in a prophetic manner, we think, would not only be exhausting but would be impossible. We slowly begin to tune out.

The second reading offers us some hope. It's a continuation of a journey through 1 Corinthians. Last week, we heard the Apostle Paul's famous description of the Church as the Body of Christ. We're unified, yet composed of many parts. We each have our unique spiritual gifts, passions, and strengths (and weaknesses!) of personality. These shouldn't compete but complement. But no matter what our gifts are, they must all be animated by the same thing: love.

“Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, it is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth.”

This is the Gospel call to accept in faith. Whether we're activists, doctors, carpenters, or stay-at-home parents, the power of the Gospel of love can and must shine out through our daily lives. And if we are fighting for justice in this world, if we feel the call to bold, prophetic witness stirring in our hearts, the words of Paul are for us as well. Without love, we become a “clanging gong” or “clashing symbol.” Without love, our witness and works will “be brought to nothing.” May all we prophets live in this “still more excellent way!”

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PRAYER

*O God, You are love and mercy itself.
Fashion all Your children more and more into Your likeness.
Forgive me for the times I have failed to live in witness to Your love.
Heavenly Father, make me patient and kind.
Drive from my heart jealousy and pride.
May I seek the interests of my neighbor as if they were my own.
Slow my temper and release my resentment.
Give me sorrow over the wrongs of others.
Give me true joy in living Your truth.
Though I see Your divine plan only partially, I trust that Your love sustains all things.
May I bear the trials that come my way.
May I believe in Your teachings, hope in Your love, and endure what You place before me.
Increase in us all, I pray, faith, hope, and love.
Amen.*