

Fr. John's Homily for the 4th Sunday in Ordinary Time
CHS JMJ
Prophets

The subject today is prophets. No, it's not a money talk. It is not the extra money coming in after expenses, but it is about those individuals who have been chosen, by God, to speak on his behalf. Thus saith the Lord: then fill in the blank. To instruct, to admonish, to encourage, exhort and to warn. And I would like to start by reading a passage, not from today's readings, but from the opening line of *The Letter to the Hebrews*. (This is, incidentally, from the King James Bible. The language is kind of flowery, but very dignified and noble.) It says, "*God, who at sundry times and divers manners, spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days, spoken unto us by his son, whom he has appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.*" We have two prophets mentioned today. The first one is Jeremiah, and the second one is Jesus himself, the ultimate prophet. (Last days?)

The first of all the prophets was Moses. God spoke to him face-to-face, on the top of Mount Sinai, and in the tent, before the ark of the covenant, in the camp of the Hebrews as they traveled to The Promised Land. 40 years worth of chatting with God and writing down what God said for the rest of us to read. At one point Moses prophesied. Thus saith the Lord: "*God will send someone like me, chosen from among people. You shall hearken to him.*" This points to the Messiah. Also known as the one who is coming into the world. And Jesus has always been considered *the second Moses*.

But there were many prophets along the way and they all pointed forward to Jesus. They are divided into the major and minor prophets but it has nothing to do with their importance. It just had to do with the length of their writings. Some were quite long-winded. Like Isaiah, Zachariah and Jeremiah. While others were men of few words. Like Hosea, Micah and Habakkuk. Some were big personalities, like Elijah, while others were obscure. Like Amos, who dismissed himself when he said to the people that he was not a prophet, but a mere shepherd, and a trimmer of sycamore trees. But the Lord chose from among the flocks to deliver some very important messages to Israel. Each of their stories is unique and God has them do his bidding in some very different and interesting ways. By their words and by their actions. And sometimes their actions were, well, kind of weird. It was kind of like theater, sometimes with props, to capture the people's attention and teach them a lesson.

In today's first reading God is giving his prophet Jeremiah some encouragement, probably in response to his feeling kind of intimidated by the people. Because, as a rule, the people didn't like prophets. You see, Prophets tell the people things they don't want to hear. God has standards, and sets the bar kind of high for his chosen people. But they are a *stiff-necked people*. They don't need a god because they've already got one. Themselves. They want to be God. They want to call their own shots. And because of this they offer resistance to the prophet. They gossip behind his back. They look for any

misstep of his so that they might conspire against him, they tell lies about him, they persecute him, they accuse him, and they call for his death.

But God says to Jeremiah: Take heart, (my son)

*“I will make you a fortified city, a pillar of iron, a wall of brass against the whole land: against Judah’s kings and princes, against its priestsand people. They will fight against youbut not prevail over youfor I am with you to **deliver** you, says the LORD.”*

Interesting. What does God mean when he says that he will deliver Jeremiah? It is my understanding that all the prophets were put to death, right up to John the Baptist, and ultimately Jesus Himself. Deliverance here must have more transcendent meaning, like salvation.

I said that Jesus was the final and ultimate prophet. But, for the past 2000 years there have certainly been many prophetic voices. They have preached to us through their lives. That is, their wordsand their actions. And in some cases they, too, have shared messages from heaven. These are private revelations and it is either Jesus, Mary, a saint, perhaps an angel, and on occasion, even God the Father.

Who were some of the prophetic voices of our own times? Well, I think Billy Graham was. Maybe Bishop Barron, or Dr. Ralph Martin from Ann Arbor. How about Bishop Fulton Sheen? He was a television star in those years when I was growing up. His show was called *Life is Worth Living*. And you can still find him on YouTube. He came on in black-and-white. He was dressed up in all of his bishop's finery, and he taught us at a chalkboard just like we were a bunch of students, which we were. He was a very strong voice against communism during the height of the Cold War. And he was quite prophetic about the future and the hard times that we would endure... Are enduring right now. Pope John Paul II and Mother Teresa would also certainly be considered “prophetic voices”.

Do you think we could use some prophets right now? Or at least some prophetic voices, right now? Today? Well, I think we have already heard them. I would say that the main prophetic voice of our times has been none other than the Blessed Mother. She has spoken to us through her many assistants. Mini-prophets. Little people like St. Bernadette, the shepherd children of Fatima, and the youth of Medjugorje. And countless local mystics who are receiving prophetic messages all over the world. people like our own Carolyn, who “allegedly” receives and gives us a heavenly message every year in October, right here in the Church. But again, notice my “qualifier”. I always use that word *allegedly* because of the nature of private revelations. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) says we don’t have to believe them, but it implied.....that it might be wise if we did.

Well you probably know where I am going with this because I have done this so many times before. And that is to remind you that you, too, can be prophetic voices in our time. This does not have to mean that you are hearing voices but that you can speak

knowledgeably and confidently about the signs of the times. What signs? Well let me provide you with a scenario that you might find helpful.

You are at a cocktail party. There is a lot of chitchat going on. Somebody laments the fact that everything has changed so dramatically in the past few years. Covid yes, but also the political situation, and the great divisions in our country between the sexes, between the right and left, the young and old, between republican and democrat, between believer and unbeliever. Everybody nods and agrees that these are strange and mysterious times. Ok, This is your opportunity. You pose a question:

“When do you suppose things began to change?” Nobody really knows the answer. But you suggest one. How about 1963?

“Why, what happened in 1963?”

“Did you know that that year our Supreme Court declared that prayer in public schools was unconstitutional?”

“We’ll no, but so what?” they say.

“Well the statistics began to change that year.”

“What statistics?”

“Well to begin with, the SATs, the scholastic aptitude test scores took a nosedive after 63. In public schools.”

“Hmmm”, they say. “Didn’t know that.”

“And for the 20 years after the ruling, unmarried couples living together increased 380%. Divorce rates were up 122%. (Prior to ‘63 there was actually a decline in divorce rates.) And unwed birth rates for 15-19 year olds were up 218%. Sexually transmitted diseases among young people was up 300%. And violent crime was up a whopping 700%, beginning in 1963.”

One might get the impression..... that there was a connection between prayer and statistics. And while you’ve got the floor, you just might remind them of all those things that happened in the decade of the 60s, beginning with November of 63. Three major assassinations. Riots in the major cities of America. Increases in the use of birth control, and increasing numbers of abortions. Increased drug use. Our growing involvement in the war in Vietnam which would eventually be lost.

You could conclude by saying, “One could get the impression that there is a correlation between prayer..... and peace and prosperity.

Maybe with enough courageous prophetic voices out there we might be able to persuade at least a percentage of this *twisted and depraved generation* to repent of sinful behaviors, to resume their prayer lives, and to return to God, so that we might permit Him to exercise His greatest attribute, His mercy, and so return to us.

+Fr. J