

Homily – 4th Sunday Ordinary Time

Every baptized Christian, by virtue of his or her baptism, is called to be a prophet. In the baptism ritual, the celebrant anoints the newly baptized with the sacred Chrism, so that united with God's people the person may remain forever a member of Christ, who is Priest, Prophet, and King. So prophecy is not just for large, dramatic figures such as Moses. Nor is it limited to the mystic past, as in ancient Israel. Each one of us is called to be a prophet in the midst of your ordinary life. But what is a prophet?

The prophet is the one who reminds God's people of what He had told them in the past about how to live their lives. When the prophet does speak about the future, they usually relates the future to the past, as in this Sunday's First Reading. The prophet says to God's People something like: "What you are now doing does not reflect what God asked you in the past to do, and therefore here are the consequences that will happen if you do not change course."

In a single word, the prophet calls God's people to integrity. The prophet sets before God's People the truth that their lives today must reflect the promises they made to God in the past so that they can enjoy God's presence in the future.

As you likely know from experience, people don't like to be told that they're making a mistake. It's a lot easier just to leave people alone than to risk alienating them. Conversely, it's easy to be popular by always telling people what they want to hear. Anyone who's a parent knows about this. Often, a parent has a choice between on the one hand being popular, and on the other hand being faithful to the responsibility of pointing out not only current problems, but also problems that are coming down the pike.

In addition to this responsibility, parents also know of a second important fact about leading their children: that actions can be just as powerful, if not more powerful, than words.

Parents know instinctively how much their children watch them. One of the reasons why children watch their parents is to learn how to accomplish things: how to fish, how to ride a bike, how to sew. The other side of this coin is that children learn to understand their parents very well, including their weaknesses and faults. How often, when parents tell their children how to act, do the children reply with, "But you don't do that!?" Teaching by example, rather than by words, prevents this.

Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount that you are blessed when your heart is pure (Matthew 5:8). What does it mean to be "pure in heart"? Today, we'd use the word integrity. God blesses you when you live your life with integrity.

Having integrity doesn't mean you're sinless or that you don't make mistakes. If that were the standard, none of us could be considered pure in heart.

Sacred Scripture says that Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and Paul all had integrity. Yet none of them were perfect. God called David, a man after his own heart, yet David committed adultery and arranged the murder of the woman's husband—and faced the consequences for his sin.

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We can learn from these biblical heroes that we don't need to be perfect to be a person of integrity. We just need a heart that is wholly committed to God. God is more interested in seeing our heart committed to him than he is in the sins we have committed. God looks what we do after we make mistakes. Are they actions that correct the situation? Last Monday I was at home when I had a call from Middleton FH. They were looking for me. A burial I thought was at 1pm was at 11am. What did I do? I went right to the cemetery, which fortunately was only 15 minutes away, and took care of the family. Mistakes will happen. We will never be perfect in this life. But we can commit to living with integrity and to maintaining a heart that is devoted to God.