

HOMILY SUNDAY 14 – B
“Called To Be A Prophet”
(Ezekiel 2:2-5; 2 Cor 12:7-10; Mk 6:1-6)

A Sunday school teacher said to her children, “We have been learning how powerful kings and queens were in Bible times. But, there is a higher power. Can anybody tell me what it is?” A small hand went up immediately. “Aces!”

“You are who you are – what are you afraid of?” That striking statement comes from Richard Rohr, who used it to begin a retreat.

Believe it or not, you are called to be a prophet!

That opening statement by Richard Rohr can be startling to some people, because many of us are afraid of what we might find if we really dared to look within ourselves, to discover our own inner truth. Part of that truth is that by baptism, we are called to be prophets.

It is good to be reminded that when we were baptized, we were baptized as priests, prophets and kings. A priest is someone who prays, and a king is a shepherd, someone who rules and cares. But what is a prophet?

One definition is that a prophet is someone who, rooted in a deep personal and prayerful relationship with God, courageously speaks the truth, especially God’s truth.

Ron Rolheiser offers some insights in his description of prophetic acts. First of all, a prophet is one who helps us lament publicly, who helps a people grieve, when things are not as they should be, or when there has been a collective loss.

Secondly, a prophet is one who is sent to refresh the memory of a people, to recall them to the original covenant, to remind them of who they are and who they are meant to be.

Thirdly, a prophet is one who offers an alternative vision to the status quo, to what is. To those who are satisfied with the status quo, a prophet may be rather uncomfortable, someone who disturbs

Shirlyanne Threndale, who taught at Newman Theological College in St. Albert, AB., claims that a prophet is someone who sees beyond the ordinary; who helps us see the fidelity of God in situations of infidelity; the forgiveness of God in situations of conflict; the unconditional love of God in situations where love is desperately lacking.

Ezekiel, in the first reading, fits the description of a prophet. Certainly he is rooted in a deep prayerful relationship with God that includes the heavens being opened and seeing a vision. He is then sent to call the people back to the covenant. However, they are rebellious, impudent, stubborn and reject him. Such can be the prophet’s lot.

Jesus, whom we know is THE prophet, implicitly assumes the role of a prophet. He also is rejected, first by the authorities, then his own family, and now his townspeople take offence at him. They ask the right questions about him (Where is his origin? What is his wisdom?) But cannot believe in him. *Jesus always demanded faith in himself before he worked a miracle, because a miracle is a sign of the kingdom and without faith would lack significance.* His townspeople do not move onto faith because his humble origin conflicts with their expectation of a glorious Messiah. Their treatment of him falls in line with the treatment of prophets by Israel over their history.

Nazareth's rejection of Jesus, her own native son, foreshadows the final rejection by his people, where initial enthusiasm turns to skepticism, then opposition and finally disbelief. The significance of this episode is a dramatic and tragic end of Jesus' Galilean ministry, foreshadowing the greater rejection of Israel and signalling a new phase of the ministry in which the Twelve will play a more active role as an anticipation of the mission of the apostolic Church towards those outside of Judaism.

An interesting note in this gospel is the term "Son of Mary." That title occurs only here in the NT, and might mean that Mary is now a widow. The claim that "brothers" means "cousins" is supported by the fact that two of the "brothers" mentioned are mentioned elsewhere as sons of another Mary.

Our call to prophecy is rooted in our baptism and in prayer of listening to God's word. For us to be prophetic is to know who we are – to acknowledge our own truth, like St. Augustine, who said "My sin is always before me." It is to find displeasing in ourselves what is displeasing to God. To be prophetic for us is to try to speak truth to others and to social issues, pleasant or not. It is also to experience an underlying peace because we are like God; doing God's will; speaking God's truth.

A contemporary example of someone who to me is quite prophetic is Richard Rohr, a Franciscan priest, writer and speaker, who founded the Centre for Contemplation and Action in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Just to conceive of a place that would hold together those two seeming opposites, contemplation and action, is a prophetic challenge to our modern world that values quiet, silence and contemplation so little.

Rohr like no one else I know is free to critique everyone and everything, including himself, and get away with it. He defies labelling – being neither liberal nor conservative, but rather seems always to forge a new path and to offer an alternative vision.

Today we are bidding farewell to Archbishop Emeritus Peter Sutton, who spent nineteen years of his life shepherding this diocese. He has come back to his home diocese, certainly not to rejection, but to much love, warmth and appreciation.

In many ways, he was prophetic. The initiative he took for youth ministry teams was daring. His presence among us, at summer camps, at pilgrimages, or just visiting, was truly pastoral. His challenge to me to form a diocesan Renewal Team and his unflagging support of it over the years was prophetic. His involvement of laity in the leadership of the diocese was prophetic as well. I am sure that each of us can add our own examples of the ways that he led us prophetically over the past two decades. And for that we are profoundly grateful and thank him sincerely.

The Eucharist we celebrate now is a prophetic meal – the way Jesus chose to remain with us, strengthen us to be prophetic in turn, offer us an alternative vision to the way of the world, and call us back to the original covenant with him, sealed with his own blood.

As we celebrate today, and bid farewell to Bishop Peter, let us renew our baptismal commitment to be priests, kings, and especially, prophets, calling each other to the fullness of life possible only in The Prophet, Jesus Christ, Son of Mary