

# Speaking on His Behalf



“Amen I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own native place.”

What is a prophet? Today, when we hear the word ‘prophet’, perhaps the immediate association is that of a fortune-teller, of one who sees what lies in the future, like Nostradamus of old, or Madame Auring giving predictions about movie stars and personalities.

This modern characterization of what prophecy is all about does not fit exactly with the way prophecy is understood in Jewish religion. Prophecy is not primarily about fortune-telling. For the Jews, a prophet is a spokesperson, one who delivers a message in behalf of God. What the prophet says does not really come from him. It comes from the one who sent him. And so every time Isaiah, Jeremiah or Ezekiel speaks, the statement is always preceded by the formula: “thus says the Lord”.

In the Gospel we listen to Jesus speaking of himself as a prophet rejected by his own people. Why was he rejected? Because he was an ordinary man in their eyes, too ordinary to be a teacher to them. This truth hurts them. Somehow truth always hurts; in



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this case, it hurts their pride.

To speak the truth is a prophet's burden. Because truth hurts, prophets gain enemies, even from among neighbors and familiar faces. Some people even kill just to keep the truth hidden. In the Gospel today, people drove Jesus out of the town. They tried to push him down the hill in order to kill him. Why? Because he was preaching the truth that salvation is God's gift offered to all, and not just to the Jews. This truth hurts because they thought that God favors Israel over the other nations. They thought that salvation was exclusive to them.

To be a prophet for our times stands as the invitation for us today. By our baptism, we have become sharers in the three-fold mission of our Lord – to be priest, king and prophet. Today we are being reminded that advocacy for the truth is part of our Christian responsibility. We are being reminded that in whatever situation we find ourselves, we need to stand up for what is right and what is true, even when it is for others a hard pill to swallow.

This is a difficult thing to do. It is a feature of our culture that we desire to keep our relationships smooth. It is often more convenient to turn a blind eye or shut one's mouth up than to rock the boat as it were. But God gives an assurance in the First Reading. He tells the prophet Jeremiah: They will fight against you but they will not prevail over you, for I am with you to deliver you.

No matter how important it is as a Christian imperative, speaking the truth, however, is not enough. We must speak the truth with love. We speak the truth in order to build up, not to destroy. St. Paul is very clear about this in his letter to the Corinthians. He says: If I speak the languages of men and even of angels, but if I have no love, my speech is no more than a noisy gong or a



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clashing cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy...but do not have love, I am nothing.

As we reflect on God's invitation for us today, we ask ourselves: How will I communicate the truth, and live out the call to prophecy, to my friend/husband/daughter/office mate? How will I do it with love, with the intent to nourish life and not to destroy it? In this mass, we pray for the gift of fortitude, for courage, that prophecy might thrive even in our times, a prophecy motivated by no less than love for God and for one another.

*Amen.*