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September 30, 2018

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Our world is currently experiencing tumultuous situations that have and will continue to have, adverse effects on both human and non-human life.. Every nook and cranny of our planet is heating up at a pace never seen before in history. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Fifth Assessment Report, written by hundreds of climate experts and scientists, indicates that recent anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases are the highest in history. Record-breaking temperatures, humidity, sea level rise, and many other factors indicate that Earth is warming fast.

Elsewhere on the planet, poverty has a strangle hold on much of the world's population. At least 80 percent of humanity lives on less than 10 dollars a day. A bi-product of poverty is hunger. More than 66 million primary school-age children across the developing world attend classes hungry; 23 million hungry are in Africa alone. Globally, about 281 million people are undernourished. Furthermore, more than 1.4 million people worldwide die each year from violence. With statistics such as these that grow more dire every day, the words of an ancient biblical text, "Would that all people of the Lord were prophets" are like a scream in the night that pierce the silence of a slumbering world too groggy to realize that what our neighbor's terrible plight today will soon become our own reality tomorrow if we do not work together to change the collision course that life is traveling right now.

This Sunday's readings remind us that just like our ancestors of old, we too have been given a share of the divine prophetic spirit which is not reserved only for certain people. This spirit is given freely for the sake of all the world's communities of life. In the first reading from the book of Numbers, the biblical writer features the people encamped with Moses and God bestowing upon them a share of the divine prophetic spirit that had been given to Moses.

In Psalm 19, this Sunday's responsorial psalm, the psalmist celebrates God's law — the decrees, precepts, ordinances — all of which give joy to the heart. God's law is to be understood as the law of love that encompasses love of God, love of self and love of neighbor. The last two stanzas of the psalm feature the psalmist in a self-reflective mood. The psalmist desires to be divinely cleansed of unknown faults and safeguarded against wanton sin. This divine cleansing and safeguard are necessary when exercising one's prophetic vocation so that one does not become a living hypocrisy between what one says and what one does.

The second reading from the Letter of James provides a deeper understanding of how the prophetic spirit works. This message, delivered after the time of Pentecost when the church was given the Spirit of God, features James — the so-named author of the text — acting boldly. He addresses the wealthy of his community. With tongue-in-cheek, he invites

them to weep and wail over their impending miseries. All that they have gained through injustice will come to naught. The wealth around which they have centered their lives will become worthless, and their lives will follow suit. Justice will be served for those who have been treated unjustly. Thus, acting in accord with the prophetic Spirit, James delivers a stinging message to the rich of his community whose wealth is ill-gotten. Simultaneously, his message is a hopeful one for the poor. Their plight does not go unchecked.

Just as some members in Moses' camp were surprised to learn that God's spirit came to rest upon Eldad and Medad who were not in the gathering of the 70 elders, and just as Joshua wanted Moses to stop Eldad and Medad from prophesying — a request that was not granted — so too, John in Mark's Gospel wants Jesus to prevent a certain unnamed person from driving out demons. Eldad and Medad were thought to be "outsiders" which is the same situation for the unnamed "exorcist" in Mark's Gospel. Thus, God's prophetic Spirit is given freely and stirred up freely, to the surprise of many people who thought they were specially chosen to receive such a wonderful gift. The Gospel closes on a note of muted warning: Be on guard against sin lest it become a stumbling block.

In sum, this Sunday's readings invite us to ponder the ways of our God whose prophetic Spirit has been poured out freely upon all people, all creation. This gift calls us to speak truth to power, to be open to others who have received this gift, and to be self-reflective for the sake of fostering and maintaining right relationship with all.

## **NUMBERS 11:25-29**

The figure of Moses looms large throughout the Pentateuch. According to the biblical text, from the moment God called out to Moses from the burning bush to commission him to set the Israelites free from Egyptian bondage (Exodus 3), Moses enjoyed an ongoing dialogue with God. Oftentimes, God came in a dense cloud to speak to Moses (19:9). Sometimes, Moses even entered the cloud that covered Mount Sinai, and there he communed with God for great lengths of time (24:15-18). The pillar of cloud became a sign of God's presence that accompanied the Israelites on their desert trek (13:21-22). The cloud, then, was a prominent image in the Exodus story.

The cloud now appears in the book of Numbers as the Israelites continue their journey to the promised land. This time, however, the biblical writer features God coming down in the cloud to speak to Moses. God is leaving the heavenly abode — the divine dwelling place. Instead of just speaking to Moses, God now acts. God takes some of the spirit that was on Moses and bestows it on the 70 elders with Moses. The elders then begin to prophesy. The biblical tradition recognizes Moses as a great prophet and leader (Deuteronomy 34:10-12). Thus, the prophetic spirit of God is now passed on from Moses to the elders, from one person to the community. Leadership and the power of God becomes a shared experience.

Surprisingly, Eldad and Medad also receive the spirit even though they are not in the company of Moses and the elders, though Moses had also chosen them to receive the spirit. They, too, begin to prophesy but unlike the elders, Eldad and Medad prophesy in the camp. This event causes quite a stir! A young man informs Moses of what is happening, and Joshua implores Moses to cease the men's activity.

Moses offers Joshua an interesting response. By means of a rhetorical question, he asks him if he is jealous. Jealousy implies a strong desire to possess something that another possesses. Joshua's concern is not only that Eldad and Medad are prophesying but also that these two men are now potential leaders. Joshua sees them as a threat to Moses' leadership. Moses' further response, namely that all people of God be prophets, basically puts Joshua on notice: God's prophetic spirit is a gift freely given; it cannot be controlled; and from this time forward, the gift of the spirit will rest upon the community and not just on certain individuals. The problem of future leadership is now resolved.

Looking at the passage as a whole, one cannot help but notice that no women are among those receiving the spirit. Women, however, were imbued with God's prophetic spirit. One classic example of a female prophet is Miriam who, according to the biblical text, is Moses sister (Exodus 15:20).

## **PSALMS 19:8, 10, 12-13, 14**

Part of a larger psalm, this second section of Psalm 19 is a hymn of praise that celebrates the goodness of God's Torah. The first part of the psalm (v. 8, 10) describes God's law: It is perfect, trustworthy, pure and true. The specific effects of the law are several: refreshes the soul, gives wisdom to the simple, endures forever and is just.

The psalmist's description and characteristics of the law provide a valuable insight into the qualities of a godly life. For the psalmist, the law is the point at which an encounter takes place with the living God whose self is revealed. The qualities attributed to the law are also true of God who is behind the law and from whose authority the law derives its value. In praising the Torah, the psalmist praises the God who is revealed in the Torah. The law, then, bestows life, gives wisdom and elicits joy.

The second part of the psalm (v. 12-13, 14) is a prayer for God's help where the psalmist speaks directly to God and affirms that righteousness cannot be achieved through Torah alone. In a tone of self-reflection and through the use of a rhetorical question, the psalmist acknowledges the reality that human beings make unintended errors and unconscious mistakes. Hence, the psalmist implores God to cleanse any unknown fault in order to be acquitted and freed of guilt.

After the psalmist asks God to cleanse him, the psalmist then seeks out God's protection. The psalmist does not want to be ruled by wanton sin. He begs for God's protection so that power and prestige do not become the dominant forces in life. Only by God's pardon and preservation can the psalmist be blameless and innocent of much transgression. What is remarkable in this responsorial psalm is the psalmist's unassuming confidence in God, a confidence that speaks of a wonderful and intimate relationship.

## **JAMES 5:1-6**

This portion of the Letter of James reflects the social and economic situation of Palestine during the first century C.E. The amassing of tracts of land in the hands of a few wealthy and powerful individuals was common throughout the Roman world. This situation was also evident in the eighth century B.C.E. where the wealthy were adding more and more estates to their land (Isaiah 5:8). The unjust treatment of people by those who have power and wealth was an ongoing problem in the ancient world and remains a problem in today's world.

James, the alleged author, paints an unpleasant picture of the wealthy hoarding countless riches which are described in terms of fine clothes and precious metals. Clearly, self-indulgence and pleasure have been the dominant driving forces. Those people with power and wealth have self-gratification as their primary objective in life. They give no thought to others, especially the poor whom they have exploited. Of note is the fact that in the time period that this letter reflects, day laborers depended on the daily wage to support themselves and their families. Peasant society was unable to store up money, food or clothing for later times. The peasants lived day by day, and not to earn a wage for the day would lead to a dire situation for both the peasant and the peasant's family. The rich, then, have exerted power over the peasants. They have denied them their due and have relegated them to a life of poverty, hunger, starvation and, in some cases, even death.

Given the situation, no wonder James writes such a stinging letter of reproach to the economic powerbrokers, and, in this case, the wealthy landowners of the day. In the style and tone of prophetic condemnation in the Hebrew Scripture (Isaiah 13:6; Ezekiel 7:19-20; Amos 8:3, 9), the ancient letter writer announces the woes that are to befall the rich landowners. By using past tense verbs to describe the riches that have rotted away, the clothes that have become moth-eaten, and the gold and silver that have become corroded, James suggests that their day of justice has already begun, and rightfully so. What the peasant land workers have experienced at the hands of the rich, the landowners will now experience themselves — devastation and economic insecurity.

By issuing a tongue-in-cheek invitation to these wealthy landowners, beckoning them to come and weep and wail over their impending miseries, and then by exposing their injustices, James exercises his prophetic vocation and mission. He speaks truth to power, reminding his readers then and now of how false the security of wealth is. He exposes social injustice and gives hope to those whose suffering is recognized. By acting prophetically, James becomes God's lightning rod and the people's conscience.

Surprisingly, those workers treated unjustly offer no resistance. If they did, most likely they would be killed or let go from work. On a deeper level, they become the epitome of nonviolent resistance as they wait for justice.

Is this story not the plight of the poor laborer today in a world that is becoming increasingly immoral economically? And James is calling all prophets!

## **MARK 9:38-43, 45, 47-48**

Just as the young man in Moses' camp was concerned about Eldad and Medad receiving a share of God's spirit, so now in Mark's Gospel, John expresses concern that someone unbeknown to the disciples is casting out demons in Jesus' name. The fact that an unnamed, unfamiliar person is able to do this task implies that within this person, God's spirit is alive and active.

Furthermore, to cast out demons in Jesus' name suggests that the man was invoking the power of Jesus' name in the rite of exorcism. To act in the name of another was to claim that person's authority for one's actions. Jesus has received his power and authority from God who enabled Jesus to heal. Thus, the person casting out demons becomes a conduit for God's and Jesus' Spirit.

Jesus' response suggests that no one who claims Jesus' power will ever speak ill of him, and that no one has prerogatives over others. The grace and spirit of God is given and available to all — women, children Gentiles, and those who live on the margins, namely, the poor and outcasts. The reference to giving a cup of cold water to drink emphasizes the point that no service, however minimal, will go unnoticed or unrewarded.

The last part of the Gospel features a series of sayings. The phrase "little ones" could be a reference to children (Mark 9:36-37), the unauthorized exorcist (9:38), or any weaker member of the Christian community. The warning against causing one of the weaker or marginal members of the community to abandon faith takes the form of an ancient proverb.

The danger of causing others to lose their faith next shifts to warnings about losing one's own faith. The series of hyperbolic sayings emphasizes the goal of entering into life or the reign of God, a goal that is so important that whatever would become a stumbling block at this goal, must be cast aside.

Finally, Gehenna was physically a valley associated in the Hebrew Scriptures with the notion of the divine judgment (Jeremiah 7:30-32; 19:2, 6). By the time of the Christian Scriptures writers, Gehenna had developed into a place of destruction in both body and soul (Matthew 10:28; 23:33).

Thus, these Sunday readings invite listeners everywhere to reflect on the ways of God and the divine law. A call to embrace one's prophetic vocation goes forth, along with an example of how to live it out. With the reign of God at hand, the time has come to move forward with anyone who is working to bring about the healing and liberation of all.

## **Planning: 26<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**By: Lawrence Mick**

The ministry of the prophet keeps showing up in the readings of Ordinary Time. Perhaps, that's a good indication of the importance of the prophetic vocation in our world. Prophets speak for God calling people back to God's ways. Doing so is never easy, because most of us don't like to be reminded when we are not living up to our best selves, the people God made us to be.

Today's readings highlight the role of the prophet in several ways. The first reading reminds us that God calls people in different ways to prophesy. Seventy of the elders in Moses' time received the spirit of prophecy in a ritual gathering. Two others, though, missed the event yet still were filled with the spirit and began to prophesy.

In the epistle and the Gospel, we are reminded of the reason we need prophets. The epistle reveals James as a prophet, chastising the rich for wage theft and abuse of the poor. In the Gospel, Jesus challenges us to be diligent in avoid temptations that lead us to sin.

There are those in every age whom God calls to be prominent prophets, people who confront the powers of evil in very public ways, often drawing attention from the media. But God also calls people to prophesy who are otherwise ordinary citizens and members of the church. In fact, the words of Moses suggest that God calls all those who receive the Spirit of God to prophesy: "Would that all the people of the Lord were prophets!"

All the baptized have received the Holy Spirit, and in the Rite of Baptism of Children, we proclaim that the baptized share in Christ's ministry as priest, prophet and king. We may carry out that mission in various ways in different situations, but it always calls for speaking the truth, especially when we see injustice and oppression.

Within the worship arena, preachers carry the clearest burden of prophecy, of course. They are called to proclaim the word of God clearly and apply it to contemporary situations, which often means challenging the way our society thinks and operates.

Planners, too, have a prophetic task for parish worship. Situations that cry out for change and justice must be regularly included in the general intercessions. Music choices need to frequently highlight God's call to care for the needy, to free the oppressed, to assist the needy, and to work for peace.

Planners might spend a little time together discussing what issues in your area and in our world need our attention during worship. How can you be prophets to your community and also call all members of the parish to carry out their own role as prophets in our society?

## Prayers: 26<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

By: Sue Robb

### INTRODUCTION

What if all of us here today embraced the role of prophet! Would that all of us listened to the cries of the poor and realized how our sins of gluttony and greed contribute to global problems! How would our world, our community, our lives be changed? These are the challenges today's readings place before us. May our minds and hearts be open to seeing ourselves in them.

### PENITENTIAL ACT

- Lord Jesus, you came to us as priest, prophet and king: Lord, have mercy.
- Christ Jesus, you call us to be priests, prophets and leaders in the world today: Christ, have mercy.
- Lord Jesus, send your Spirit upon us to enlighten and strengthen us for your mission: Lord, have mercy.

### PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

**Presider** God of mercy and compassion, hear and answer these prayers and strengthen our resolve to serve you in building your kingdom.

**Minister** We pray for all priests, prophets and spiritual leaders who have devoted their lives to proclaim Jesus Christ to the world: May they be strengthened in their mission ... we pray,

- For those who store up earthly treasures and deny the poor just wages: May they hear the cries of the poor and respond with generosity, compassion and recompense ... we pray,
- For those whose sins of addiction cripple and bind them: May the grace and mercy of God free them from all earthly desires and may they help others on their journey to be free from addictions ... we pray,
- For all who use their unique God-given gifts to work for justice and peace: Like Medad and Eldad, may each person's talents be recognized and honored as they work to build God's kingdom ... we pray,
- For peaceful rest for the weary, healing for the sick, strength for the weak, and hope for the lost: May we be instruments of love and compassion to all we meet ... we pray,
- For all who will die today, especially those who will die alone: May they be welcomed into heaven by all the angels and saints ... we pray,

**Presider** God, giver of all grace and mercy, hear the prayers we place before you and those we hold in the silence of our hearts. Strengthen our resolve to devote more of our time, talent and treasure to those in need. This we ask, through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

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