Spirituality
Scripture for Life
Voices of Sisters
Spirituality

Pope Francis waves to and holds a flag that says, "Pace."

Pope Francis waves to an estimated 12,500 people attending a meeting of popular movements and church groups committed to working for peace and justice at the Arena in Verona May 18. Comboni Fr. Alex Zanotelli, one of the event organizers, holds a peace flag. (CNS/Lola Gomez)



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In times such as these, when faith can be influenced by fundamentalism and Christian nationalism, some believers aspire to become prophets. Others see themselves as prophets already. Still others identify specific individuals as prophets because they understand the prophetic spirit as a gift reserved only for certain people. Surely this is the case in today's first reading from Numbers where Joshua opposes the prophetic spirit being passed on to two people not originally in the circle of the 70 elders. But Moses is quick to respond with the wish that all people would be imbued with the prophetic spirit.

This is exactly what happens during Pentecost when the community gathered received the spirit of the Divine One breathed upon them by the resurrected Christ. Hence, the locus of the prophetic moves away from specific individuals to the

community as a whole. Furthermore, if we ponder deeply the amazing insight inscribed in the Wisdom of Solomon, namely, that God's immortal spirit is in all things (Wisdom 12:1), then all creation, the entire cosmos, has the capacity to be prophetic, forever revealing the fecundity, the mystery, the beauty, the sacredness of the Holy One. Revelation of this nature is the deepest expression of the prophetic closely associated with the mystical tradition.

Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 29, 2024

Numbers 11:25-29
Psalm 19
James 5:1-6
Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48

To act with a prophetic consciousness and spirit within the human condition, however, is far more arduous. For those who choose to exercise the divine gift of prophetic consciousness, a spirit imbued in all creation, the task includes speaking to social, political and religious leaders, to judicial officials, to power brokers, especially those involved with shaping the global economy. To act prophetically is to speak truth to power, knowing that the prophetic word is always a graced word, no matter how foreboding or harsh that word may have to be. The prophetic word invites people to change and transformation, to be liberated from whatever binds them, which in turn, causes them to bind others.

Today's second reading from the letter of James is an example of the prophetic consciousness at work. This portion of James's letter addresses the social injustices existing in the early Christian world. Wealthy landowners enriched themselves, garnering their riches at the expense of their day laborers who were paid either unfairly or not at all. Because a class system was in place, those less fortunate or of modest means who lived just and righteous lives were hauled into court to stand trial so that they could be condemned and thus live a life of disgrace within the community. These wealthy "lords" ruled over their workers and people in general as if they were their "serfs."

To those who have disenfranchised others for personal gain, the prophetic word goes forth that condemns their life of self-absorbed and ill-gotten luxury. They are

verbally confronted by the reality that their wealth can neither save them when life-altering tragedy strikes nor guarantee them a place in the realm of the Divine. Unfortunately, self-aggrandizement and self-indulgence through disenfranchisement as described in James's letter is systemic. A system of feudalism existed throughout biblical times, throughout the Middle Ages and even today it continues to exist but in new forms and ways that are just as hegemonic, hierarchical and disenfranchising as in the days of lords and commoners otherwise known as serfs and the working class.

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In this 21st century, corporations are the new landlords who control not only nations' economies but also workers' wages. For example, a USA Today story reported that some employees working in the garment manufacturing industry in Southern California were earning as little as $1.58 per hour. Despite the labels stating "Made in the USA," most Americans are unaware that their garments are being made in sweatshops for wages far less than the legal law requires, the article noted. Needless to say, the struggle for just and fair wages for employees is a systemic problem and calls for a prophetic response, one like the letter of James delivers.

In sum, the divine spirit, wise and prophetic in nature, has been poured out upon all creation. The letter of James provides a window into prophetic consciousness and action. Would that the prophetic spirit be stirred up in the lives of all people so justice can take lasting root to end all forms of oppression.

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