

We can become God's prophets through love

Thomas Gumbleton | Feb. 7, 2013 The Peace Pulpit

The first lesson today is about a prophet, Jeremiah, and about prophecy, and the Gospel lesson is also about Jesus as a prophet and his prophetic work. We might think these lessons don't apply to us very much because who of us thinks of ourselves as a prophet? I don't think many of us do. We think prophets are other people -- "I wouldn't be a prophet" -- and yet we should recall our baptism.

When you were baptized, when each of us was baptized, we were anointed with holy chrism, and the priest said, "God anoints you with the chrism of salvation. As Jesus was anointed priest, prophet and king -- ruler." We are called to be always as a member of his body -- priest, prophet and king -- ruler." We are called to be anointed as prophets. Yet that still seems strange to most of us, I believe, because we really do think of prophets as people who are other than ourselves.

It's important this morning to discover a little bit about what it means to be a prophet. First of all a prophet is not someone who predicts the future. I think that's sometimes why we are unable to think of ourselves as prophets because we think we would have to be able to predict the future. But that's not what prophecy is. A prophet is someone who, as in the book of the prophet Isaiah, he speaks about himself: "God has taught me, so I speak as God's disciple and I know how to sustain the weary. Morning after morning I wake and I listen, to listen like a disciple, someone learning God's ways."

A prophet, as Isaiah says, is someone who not only speaks for God, but who first listens to God. We have to be those who listen deeply to the word of God. That's why it's important for us every Sunday as we come together for the Eucharist to, if possible ahead of time, read over the word of God so that we're prepared to hear it more deeply when we gather together. We must listen to the word of God so that then we speak the word of God.

We proclaim the word of God. That's our task as disciples of Jesus, baptized and anointed to be priest, prophet and king. Perhaps it's important to realize, too, that the most important prophecy that we will ever proclaim will not be the words that we say. We might speak brilliantly at times and really overwhelm other people with the brilliance of our arguments and persuade them to follow what we say. That's possible, but how we really proclaim God's word and God's way is by the way we live.

There's a story about St. Francis of Assisi that perhaps you've heard. He was telling his followers how they were to go out and preach -- "Go everywhere and preach God's words" -- and he said, "And if necessary, use words." In other words, you're going to preach more by the way you live, the example of your life, than you will by any words you say. Words can be shallow, empty, hollow, and hypocritical even, but the genuineness of your life is a message that will truly be heard. That's how we become prophetic.

Our second lesson today reminds us or instructs us in a very marvelous way what is the message, most of all, that we are to proclaim. It's the message about God. There's a hymn that we sing sometimes: Where there is love, there is God. God is love. St. Paul in that second lesson today is instructing us. The most important gift that God gives that we use to minister as God's disciples, as disciples of Jesus, is the gift of love.

Over the 50-some years that I've been a priest, I've celebrated or witnessed hundreds of weddings. Very often, that second lesson today is used at weddings because it speaks so well about what is the prophetic work of married people. During the wedding ceremony, the prayer said at the Mass is this: "God, you have made the bond of marriage a holy mystery, a symbol of the love of Jesus for his church. Hear our prayers for (whoever). With faith in you and in each other, they pledge their love today. May their lives always bear witness to the reality of that love."

Married people are committed to be prophetic in this most important way of all: that their lives be a witness to the reality of love in our world, which is really the reality of God's presence in our world. As I said before, I've witnessed hundreds of weddings because I've been a priest for 50-some years. Now I'm beginning to witness many anniversaries for people.

It's really beautiful, and I'm sure you've experienced this too, when you've seen a couple who have lived together in faithful love for 30, 40, 50, 60 years. It doesn't always work this way because sometimes marriages do fail, but when it does, when two people really witness the reality of God's love in their lives, it's a beautiful thing to behold and something to rejoice and give thanks for. It is truly being prophetic.

Married people have a role of prophecy that I think most do not really understand. Their love is a message about God, and as they nurture that love and spread that love with their family and wherever they are, they're being prophetic; they're proclaiming God's word. It's not only in marriage, of course, that we are to live this message of love. Every part of our lives should be an expression of love for God. First of all, love the Lord your God with your whole heart, mind and soul and all your strength. Love your neighbor: Love your neighbor as you love yourself.

For our lives to be prophetic, they must be lives where we love. There's lots of different ways in which we can reach out in love to others. I think now because it's very current in our national political life, how important it is to reach out in love to those who are immigrants among us, the 12 million people we talk about as "illegals." We must be drawing them in out of love to welcome them as brothers and sisters.

Finally now in our Congress, there really is an effort to clear up this situation where we have so many people who we talk about as "undocumented" or "illegal," like some person could be illegal just by being who he or she is. We have to welcome them. They will enrich us, and we can enrich them. That's reaching out in love. There's lots of ways, and I'm sure most of us can think of ways, that we can help those who right now in our country are suffering from the difficulties presented by our economy, which is still so stagnant -- many people out of work, many people underemployed, struggling just to get along.

We have to find ways to try to change things so that it won't be this way forever, but also, in the meantime, in the emergency, to reach out in love in whatever way we can. Also in our everyday life and in our larger community, perhaps one of the greatest things we have to remember if we're going to live a prophetic life according to the way of Jesus ... the hardest commandment he gave: Don't just love those who love you; love your enemies. Do good to those that hurt you; return good for evil.

We live in a society where there is, as we all know, so much violence, and yet the response so often is to do more violence in response, as if you're going to somehow overcome violence with violence. That's not the way of Jesus. The way of Jesus is the power of transforming love. We really have to try in every way we can in our individual lives, in our life as a church community, in our life as a civil community, we have to reach out in love even to those who do not love us.

Don't just love those who love you; love your enemy. This is an area where I'm sure every one of us can grow in love to become more prophetic and help to change our society and change our world so that we do not have a

world where we're constantly engaged in war and violence, but a world that is coming to experience the peace that God wills for all of us. As we listen to these lessons today, I hope we understand that God is calling each of us to be prophetic, to proclaim God and God's message, which is love.

Where there is love, there is God. If we make love the predominate message of our lives, we will not only be speaking about love, we'll be speaking about God. We'll be proclaiming God and God's message -- truly the prophets that we were anointed to be at our baptism.

[Homily given at St. Hilary Catholic Church in Redford, Mich. The transcripts of Bishop Gumbleton's homilies are posted weekly to NCRonline.org. [Sign up here](#) [2] to receive an email alert when the latest homily is posted.]

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