

February 22, 2015

First Lent '15

Jesus is the prophet of the desert

*Lent is the time to turn around, face our demons,
feel our smallness, and prepare to enter the promised land*

The Desert is the Place of Temptation

Jesus was tempted in the desert. The desert, biblically and mystically, is not so much a physical place as a place in the heart. It is that place where we go to face our demons, feel our smallness, be in a special intimacy with God, and prepare ourselves for the promised land. This is what Jesus did. This is what each of us must do

The Prophet

A prophet is one who speaks the Word of God to people of their day. Oblate Fr. Ronald Rolheizer offers this reflection on prophecy.

“The Hebrew prophets loved their tradition and criticized it at the same time. Today, it is common to hear the complaint from priests, ‘*You are criticizing the Church.*’ But criticizing the Church is just being faithful to the pattern set by the prophets and Jesus. He loved and respected his Jewish religion, yet he pushed the envelope wide open. He often healed people on the Sabbath, a deliberate statement against making a practice into a dogma higher than human need. Criticizing something doesn’t mean we don’t love it.

“The prophet is both feared and needed. Institutions always want loyalists and ‘company people,’ but prophets aren’t. They are dangerous to the status-quo because they go poking around in our shadow side. Without the prophetic function, any group or religion will become self-serving, self-perpetuating, and self-promoting. It’s a very short time, once the prophet is kicked out, that the group begins circling the wagons around itself, and all sense of mission and message is lost.

“I think it is fair to say that the prophetic voice has been repressed in almost all of Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant Christianity. Its criticisms are often directed, not at itself, but at the other: the sinner, the heretic - always the other.”

A Prophet for Our Time

Let us listen to a prophet who is speaking the Word of God to the people of today. He is Jim Wallis, the president of Sojourners Community, from who's magazine, Sojourners, this brief is taken.

"I spent yesterday at the World Bank, where President Jim Kim was seeking an alliance with international faith leaders. He told us, '*I need your help*' to meet the Bank's bold goal of ending extreme poverty by 2030. Kim longs to see '*the prophetic voice*' linked to the evidence of what has and hasn't worked to end poverty. This made us reflect on ourselves and the need for confession and humility to end the extreme poverty of those billion people who live on less than \$1.25 per day. Let's be honest: if we had been really living by our faith, there would not be as much extreme poverty in the world.

"Lent is calling us to confession, humility, and repentance, something our culture is not very good at. We tend to blame people for being poor, that something must be wrong with them. If black young men are having trouble with police, many white people suspect it must be what they are doing more than with the systems we perpetuate.

"It is increasingly clear there is no military solution to an ideological threat like ISIS. We can't bomb our way out of this, and just doing what we have done for 14 years is what got us here — doing more of it will only make things worse.

"The best spiritual guide to face the dark side of anything is expressed by the Prophet Paul, '*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*' That's not just good spiritual advice, it's also what works best."

The Way of the Prophet

- † The prophet gets up after a long weary night and does what needs to be done for the children
- † The prophet criticizes the church when it makes a church practice higher than human need
- † The prophet engages the needs of our country through civil political dialogue rather than whining and blaming elected officials for whining and blaming other elected officials
- † The prophet seeks to end violence by providing hope and opportunity to the billion around the world who have none

Let it not be said that that the prophetic voice has been repressed in our families, in our communities or in our church.

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Happy Lent to all of you resident and guest prophets here at St. Mary!