

March 5, 2017

1st Sunday of Lent

The Need for Prophecy is in our Land

Lent is the time to turn around, face our madness, and speak the voice of prophecy

The Desert is the Place of Temptation

Some background to the Gospel today. 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. This is what Jesus did. This is what each of us must do. It is the work of prophecy.

What is a Prophet?

A prophet is not a fortune teller or one who predicts the future; a prophet is one who speaks the Word of God to the 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. The prophet is both feared and needed. Institutions always want loyalists and ‘company people’ which 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 or country 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.”

The Need for Prophets today

I received an article Friday titled, “*Spiritual Practice in the Time of Madness,*” by Rodger Kametz from Tikkun Magazine. Feb. 28, 2017. It speaks to the need for prophecy in our time.

“Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav, an early 19th century Hasidic master, offered a parable about a seer who foretold that the year’s harvest of rye would be contaminated with ergot, a fungus with effects similar to LSD. Whoever ate the rye would become mad. There was an immediate suggestion to put aside enough grain so they wouldn’t have to eat this year’s harvest.

But the seer said, *“But then we will be the only ones who will be sane. Everyone else will be mad. Therefore they will think that we are the mad ones. Therefore, we too must eat this year’s grain. But we will put a mark on our foreheads so at least we will know we are mad.”*

“This parable touches on the emotional current in our country today. It seems that something is going mad, that the country is eating something that is guaranteed to distort reality.”

(As an aside, I am not applying this story to any particular political official, party or voter today, it applies to us all. To continue . . .) “One symptom of this kind of madness is a sense of weariness in the land, as if time is slowing down. There is not only the distortion of truth, but the constant shifts of attention, the clever diversions that redirect attention when things are going our way. It now requires so much effort to keep pace that merely to be informed has become almost a full time job in which we are challenged every hour to maintain our own sense of reality and normalcy against a widespread infection of madness.

“It seems like everyone has consumed the harvest, is going mad. The different kinds of manipulations are a description of a metaphysical infection that is brought about by consuming this contaminated “rye” as our daily bread.

The Work of Prophecy

“During such times,” Rodger Kamentz says, “I have found one mark of reality that is useful. It is a daily practice of morning meditation. Instead of waking to the assault of the morning news, I sit quietly and meditate, doing meditation on the breath and simple awareness meditation. I immediately observe the enduring truth that whatever arises also falls away, whether it is my breath, or the sound of a sparrow singing, or the noise of a truck going by. The concept of impermanence, one of the three “marks of existence” in Buddhist teaching, is wonderfully comforting now, and worth consulting to reorient myself to my inner reality. I believe each of us must touch on a deeper reality every day, or we will eventually become mad.”

We talked about this last Sunday - the spiritual practice of sitting quietly and observing the re-connection to ourselves which dissolves our fear around the uncertainty of things. During such times, we simply observe ourselves. As Fr. Richard Rohr, OFM, writes, *“We pay attention not to **what** we are, but to **that** we are.”*

Let’s do this - sit quietly and become aware of a larger consoling presence within us . . . of something becoming more peaceful . . . more hopeful . . . more trustful . . .

Thank You! We have just touched reality - on our behalf and on behalf of our country. Happy Lent to all of you prophets here at St. Mary!