40A Homily for the Twenty-second Sunday of the Ordinary Time Year A

Do we really understand what does it mean to be a prophet in the modern world or how to practice our prophetic role received at the baptism? Today’s first reading beautifully defines the role of a prophet: “ You seduced me, Lord and I let myself be seduced; you were too strong for me, and you prevailed…it is as if fire is burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones; I grow weary holding back, I cannot endure.” When Lord calls us to be a prophet through our very baptism: we are sort of obsessed and possessed by him. We are passionately preoccupied by his word and by his truth.

Prophecy finds its source in God (Num 12:6-8).Once chosen, it is nothing we could do but live and proclaim his word irrespective of its consequences. Therefore, calling of the Lord is not the beginning of a life of tranquility or a voyage of smooth sailing. Following Christ costs the follower. Follower of Christ doesn’t preach what he or she likes to preach nor does he or she preach what hearers like to hear or what please the hearers. We preach what Christ wants us to live, what Christ wants us to proclaim. We preach that Gospel of truth and mercy with love as Christ, the Eternal Word preached what his Father wants him to speak and what ultimately pleased, his Father. As prophets, we point to the way of Christ not our own ways or the ways that our hearers like to tread. Our prophetic role doesn’t not have any hidden agenda of alienating anyone, excluding anyone or claiming any superiority over anyone. We are simply the faithful servants of the Word not its masters. We are summoned to preach such Gospel with firmness but at the same time accompany our message with gentleness, love and above all with mercy. We can’t be silent. Sometimes our reluctance to preach the Gospel could lead us settle in our own comfort zones. That type of silence is sinful and unbecoming of Christians. If we don’t preach that Gospel of Christ, we cease to exist as Christians and lose the sense of purpose in life. That is why St Paul felt deep within his heart and lamented: “Woe to me if don’t preach the Gospel.” (1 Cor 9:16).

The second reading today further tells us how to live the prophetic role in our own times: “Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect.” We all know that we pay a price for such an approach, but we do so willingly because that is what Christ wants us to do and commands us to do. This is the radical call to discipleship and the prophetic role. Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” Very demanding, forthright and clear words - words that will hold us accountable before His thrown of mercy one day.

It is here we need to ask the question, where do we stand as prophets in the current social issues? As Christians how are we to practice our prophetic role received at the baptism? We need to discern the message of Christ found in the Gospel with wisdom and understanding of the Holy Spirit and boldly proclamation that message with mercy and love.

What is our prophetic stance in the current debate of the Refugees and asylum seekers in Australia as we celebrated the Refugee Week few days ago? Latest Media Release from bishop Vincent Long Van Nguyen OFM Conv, Catholic Bishops’ Delegate for Migrants and Refugees says: “It is with sadness that we have heard of yet another death of a refugee on Manus Island. This death could have been prevented. The Australian Government has been removing support services on Manus Island since the announcement of the closure of the detention centre. Those in the care of the Australian Government whilst in offshore processing, who have come to Australia for safety and a better life, deserve more. I urge the Australian Government to provide support services for those who are on Manus Island, awaiting a resolution to their current situation. The Australian Government needs to listen to the concerns of these people and treat them with dignity.”

What is our prophetic stance with regards to the killing of the unborn, issues relating to euthanasia and death penalty? Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception to its natural end. The overriding concern is to uphold the sanctity of human life. God, the merciful Father is the source of all human life and that human life is the basis of all goods, and is a gift of God’s love. No man has a right to decide on the termination of life of another person or his or her own life, because God’s mercy is beyond human imagination. While doing our best to alleviate pain and suffering and providing best palliative care, we see human suffering through different lenses. Human suffering through Christ’s Passion, Death and Resurrection is now transformed for us to be redemptive and salvific.

What is our prophetic role in standing up for natural marriage? Let me share with you two recent concrete examples. Yesterday, the front page article in the Weekend Australian revealed that this year’s commercial – featuring a father singing his baby a lullaby- will not be broadcast. Why? Because after Free TV Australia, industry body which represents all of Australia’s commercial **free-**to-air television licensees, felt that such ads likely to contain political matter. That is how simply a father’s day advertisement was censored. Secondly, countrywide the mother’s or father’s day celebrations in child care centers are no longer celebrated rather they are called family day celebrations. This is the absurdity of the era in which we live in. In the presence of such absurdity, while respecting every human person and sexual orientation, we are asked to raise our prophetic voices with firmness and mercy and say together with Pope Francis “…When God completes his work of creation and makes his masterpiece; the masterpiece is man and woman.” In such masterpiece, as Pope Francis teaches, God’s image is fully expressed in the natural marriage, because both in man and woman as a couple, as spouses we find the full image of God.

Finally, what is our prophetic role in standing up for the poor and the marginalized? The dignity of every person, independent of ethnicity, creed, gender, sexuality, age or ability, is the cornerstone of Catholic Social Teaching. Poverty, hunger, homelessness, oppression and injustice desecrate that sublime dignity instilled in every human person by God himself. Are you involved in at least one or the other myriads of social action programmes in the Church? It could be Vinnies, Caritas or Louise Van? Currently, the Catholic Church continues to stand as the second largest social services provider after the Common Wealth Government in Australia. It is our prophetic duty to reach out to the people who live in the fringes of the society because the Gospel that the Christian prophet preaches is a Gospel of the poor and for the poor.

Let me wind up this homily by citing words of Fyodor Dostoevsky: “Men do not accept their prophets and slay them, but they love their martyrs and worship those whom they have tortured to death.”