

**Sunday, January 28<sup>th</sup>, 2018**

**Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time  
Lectionary: 71**

**Reading 1: Dt. 18:15-20**

**Responsorial Psalm: Ps. 95:1-2, 6-7, 7-9**

**Reading 2: 1 Cor. 7:32-35**

**Alleluia: Mt. 4:16**

**Gospel: Mk. 1:21-28**

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The First Reading of Deuteronomy tells us of the promise that Yahweh made to the people of prophets who would tell them what he would command them to say. This reading tells us that the people had petitioned God to not hear his voice again. Therefore, "in those days, Moses spoke to the people, saying, "A prophet like me will the Lord, your God, raise up for you from among your own kin; to him you shall listen" (Dt. 18: 15-20). What God promises he always delivers. In the Old Testament we have the testimony of many prophets that spoke in the name of the Lord fulfilling God's promise to his people.

A Prophet is the one who tells the people what God wants. A Prophet is not simply the one who speaks of God; he is rather, the one who speaks in the name of God while under His inspiration. The prophet receives the word of God and transmits it. It is said that the prophet is the "mouth of God" because the prophet speaks with his mouth the word of God.

Now, Jesus Christ is the Word itself; that is, Jesus Christ is the full expression of God for us. Hence, when Jesus began to preach and act, he surprised the people of his time. The Gospel of Mark tells us that, "His hearers were astonished at his words," And when Jesus expelled a demon they said, "What is this? A new teaching with authority," because, "even the unclean spirits obey him" (Mk. 1: 21-28).

In the fight against the evil spirits it is important to take into account some recommendations. As the Devil and demons are always on the lookout to make human beings fall into sin and to make them walk the path that leads to condemnation, we must remember that Jesus Christ tells us about the importance of vigilance.

And the most effective means of monitoring to prevent evil from approaching us is to watch in prayer, thus filling our heart with God who is the one who expels Evil. Thus the Enemy will not find a place in our hearts. And the evil has no place there if the person is well united with God.

**What is that union with God?** It consists of renouncing one's own will and accepting the Will of God. It consists in accepting the commands of God and renouncing one's desires. And this is so, because whoever is united with God is empowered with the very strength of God. This is the vigilance that the Lord asks of us.

Returning to the First Reading, it is unfortunate that the word "Prophet" in our times may refer to those who predict the future. Certainly the prophet can speak of the future, if God so wishes, but the prophetic message includes much more than that. "The word of the prophet edifies, exhorts and comforts" according to Saint Paul, (1 Cor. 14: 3).

The message of the prophet is usually demanding, because it clearly recalls humanity's commitments to God. The prophetic message is also comforting, as it comforts and revives the people to God, and discovers hope in the midst of darkness. It is also an edifying message, because it teaches and corrects; educates and forms, in addition to healing and purifying, and calling for conversion.

The prophet does not call himself to ministry; it is God who chooses him. It is God who has the initiative and usually calls the prophet in an irresistible and seductive way. That is what Jonah knew, whom we saw in the readings last week in the midst of a storm and then in the belly of a whale, until he decided to preach what God had told him, (Jon. 1:1-16).

Here is what the prophet Amos says about God's call to be a prophet: "The lion has roared who will not fear? The Sovereign Lord has spoken who can but prophesy? (Am. 3: 8).

And Jeremiah: "You deceived me, LORD, and I was deceived; you overpowered me and prevailed, It felt in me something like a burning fire imprisoned in my bones, and although I tried to extinguish it, I could not," (Jer. 20: 7 and 9).

Who does God choose as prophets? Of course, anyone he wants. It includes all kinds of people: men and women, rich and poor, adults and youth, and sometimes even from the very womb of the mother as is the case of Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations," (Jer. 1:5).

Then comes a time in the history of salvation when prophecy is interrupted, (1 Macc. 4:46).<sup>1</sup> The people of Israel begin to live in expectation of the promised Prophet. Henceforth, the enthusiasm raised by John the Baptist, who is the last of the Old Testament Prophets, because, although the account of his life and his preaching is recorded in the New Testament, he is prior to Christ, he prepares the way to Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> And they laid up the stones in the mountain of the temple in a convenient place, till there should come a prophet, and give answer concerning them.

However, the mission of the prophet is rather ungrateful, because the word of God is usually a burden for those who do not live in grace or observe the commandments of God: kings, princes, authorities, priests, false prophets and for people in general. Hence, many prophets are reluctant to exercise their function. But God does not repent his call and insists. We saw that when Moses resists, his excuses are of no value to him (Ex. 3: 11-12).<sup>2</sup> Neither are those human limitations of Jeremiah (Jer. 1: 6-7).<sup>3</sup>

The prophets have their crisis of depression and rebellion. Such is the case of Jonah after the conversion of Nineveh (Jon. 4).<sup>4</sup> and Elijah (1 kgs. 19:4).<sup>5</sup> Jeremiah complains bitterly and almost abandons his mission (Je. 15:18, 20, 14-18). Also Ezekiel (Ezk. 3: 14s).<sup>6</sup>

The prophets almost never see the fruit of their mission. Isaiah's preaching rather hardens the people's hearts (Is. 6: 9, Mt. 13: 14-15). However, the prophet must speak in the name of God whether they hear it or not (Ezk. 2: 5-7 and 3: 11-21).

The listeners were amazed at Jesus's words because they were a message of salvation, of healing, of love, of forgiveness, of suffering, of commitment to the things of God, of liberation from the chains of sin. In

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<sup>2</sup> And Moses said to God: Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?

<sup>3</sup> And I said: Ah, ah, ah, Lord God: behold, I cannot speak, for I am a child.

<sup>4</sup> And now, O Lord, I beseech thee take my life from me: for it is better for me to die than to live.

<sup>5</sup> And he went forward, one day's journey into the desert. And when he was there, and sat under a juniper tree, he requested for his soul that he might die, and said: It is enough for me, Lord, take away my soul: for I am no better than my fathers.

<sup>6</sup> The spirit also lifted me, and took me up: and I went away in bitterness in the indignation of my spirit: for the hand of the Lord was with me, strengthening me.

Jesus, all the prophets have their message accomplished. Jesus helps us to rediscover the greatness of humanity.