

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)

(Amos 7:12-15 / Mark 6:7-13)

12.07.2015

Prophets of love

According to the 2nd Vatican Council, by our baptism we “are made one with Christ” and we all share in his “priestly, prophetic, and kingly office” (LG 31; CCC 897).

Today our first reading reminds us of our prophetic ministry. The words addressed to the prophet Amos are addressed to each one of us: “Go and prophesy”.

We all have the responsibility to keep the Spirit of prophecy alive in our Church. The world needs to hear the voice of Christians on all matters which pertain to human life. Our political and economic leaders need to be challenged by Christian prophets.

While confrontation and systematic opposition lead nowhere, as Christians, with respect and gentleness, we are supposed to bring the Gospel into all the debates which shake our world. In a constructive way and in dialogue with them, we have the mission to remind our brothers and sisters of the primacy of human life.

In our Gospel reading, we are told that Jesus gave the Twelve “authority over the unclean spirit”. I wonder if our main prophetic ministry should not aim at exercising our authority over unclean spirits at work in our hearts and in our world.

What are these “unclean spirits”? The meaning of *unclean* is related to the theme of purity. In the Gospels, Jesus makes important statements about purity. One of them is particularly relevant to our subject: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God” (Mt 5:8).

Evil spirits prevent us from seeing God, from discerning his presence in our brothers and sisters. Unclean spirits blind us to the loving and luminous action of God in his creation.

These past weeks we heard a lot about migrants dying in the Mediterranean sea, or languishing at our frontiers, exploited or maltreated.

As Christians, if we want to be faithful to our prophetic vocation we must reject the anti-refugee rhetoric of nationalist politicians, we must reject all forms of racism.

Allow me to quote here some statements issued by official Catholic teachers. The French Bishops declared: “The dignity of human beings is at stake, Catholics in France must overcome their prejudices and fears”.

Fr Patrick Daly, general secretary of the Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences of the European Community, reminded us that “for the Catholic Church, the fundamental principle underlying the migration issue is one of deep and profound compassion”. Auxiliary Bishop William Kenney of Birmingham said that “we have an obligation to look after these people (...), the reason being that they are men and women made in the image of almighty God”.

These are very simple and yet prophetic words. They challenge the unclean spirits which prevent us from seeing God in our brothers and sisters. They challenge the evil spirits of greed and selfishness. Not only these statements are the proof that sometimes our bishops can be prophets but they also remind us of our responsibility at the level of our families and Christian communities.

The problems are not localised only in faraway countries... in 2014, racially motivated crimes in Northern Ireland have risen by more than 50%. A shopkeeper who runs a store selling flags in Belfast told the BBC that he is asked for Ku Klux Klan flags at least

once a week. He described those trying to buy them as “ordinary people”. A few days ago, Nazi and Confederate flags were seen in Co. Antrim.

There are insidious evil spirits at work in “ordinary people”. We can be complacent towards behaviours and words which are contrary to the Gospel.

Here again we are called to be prophets of the Good News of Jesus Christ, simply by stating and witnessing to God’s love and care for all human beings.

Our prophetic vocation does not require of us to make extraordinary declarations on the media and by social networks, where we are, in the ordinary circumstances of our lives, we are prophets when we speak the truth about the core values of the Gospel and when we bear witness to God’s love for all.

What happen in Charleston, in Tunisia, in France or in Belfast begins at home with parents, religious and political leaders speaking the wrong words, distorting the truth about what it means to be a human being in relationship with other human beings, allowing unclean spirits to find a home in human hearts.

Moses declared: “If only the whole people of the Lord were prophets, and the Lord gave his spirit to them all!” (Num 11:29 BJ). Indeed the Lord has given us his Spirit of truth and of prophecy and it is our responsibility and our duty not only to speak about it but to live it too: to make of our lives a living and truthful proclamation of the Gospel.

In the opening prayer of our celebration, we asked God to give us “the grace to reject whatever is contrary to the name of Christ and to strive after all that does it honour.”

On this 12th July, during this marching season, may we allow the Holy Spirit to purify our hearts and minds from all evil and unclean spirits, from all seeds of division, self-centredness, bigotry and hatred. And let us be clear this work of purification is not necessary only for “them”, the others, the bad ones... it begins within each one of us here and now. So that our world, our country, our communities and families may be a bit different, more evangelical, more caring, inclusive and respectful, may we be prophets of love, not only in word but also and mainly by our whole way of life!