

Homily - September 9th and 10th, 2023
23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time



Here is a quote, and I would like to see if you can identify where it comes from, who the author is. ***“I can’t stand your religious meetings. I’m fed up with your conferences and conventions. I want nothing to do with your religious projects, your pretentious slogans and goals. I’m sick of your fund-raising schemes, your public relations and image making. I’ve had all I can take of your***

noisy ego-music. When was the last time you sang to me? Do you know what I want? I want justice—oceans of it. I want fairness—rivers of it. That’s what I want. That’s all I want” (Amos 5:21-24)

It may not sound like the Biblical language we are used to hearing, but it is from the Bible, the Old Testament, the Book of the Prophet Amos to be precise. As you know there are many translations of the Bible. Each weekend, Catholics in Canada and much of the English-speaking world hear God’s Word from a version called the New Revised Standard Version (N.R.S.V.). This quote I just read doesn’t come from the N.R.S.V. but comes from a translation called The Message. The Message, just like every other translation of the Bible from the original Hebrew and Greek is an interpretation. I personally like The Message translation and its interpretation. Eugene Peterson spent two years translating the Bible, the Word of God that has fed countless generations of people, into a translation with words and expressions we use today. I appreciate his effort to make the Word of God relevant to readers like me. If it’s more readable, I’m more likely to read it and ponder it. And if I’m more likely to read it, I’m more likely to try and put it into action.

Like I said, it was a quote from the Prophet Amos, who lived some 700 years before the birth of Jesus. God was sending his Word into the world by many means including the prophets of old. In the form of Jesus, God’s Word becomes human flesh, that we might hear and respond to that Word from one who was just like us—fully human. Prophets are God’s mouthpiece, but people didn’t often listen to them in Biblical times, nor are we very good at listening to the prophets God sends us here and now.

The times we are living in calls us to listen to the prophets in our midst. Prophets don't walk among us to tell us we're doing it all wrong and that the world is going to hell in a handbasket. Their job is not to be fortune tellers or tell us the world is about to end. Their job is to tell us the truth about God and God's plan for the entire world. Prophets are like alarm clocks, waking us up from our sleep.

When we look at the state of our planet earth, we desperately need a wake up call. If you recall, from 1983 to 1985, an alarm clock went off and the world woke up to the famine in Ethiopia. In a very short time, 1.2 million people died from drought, 2.5 million people were displaced, and 200,000 children became orphans. It was at that time, Irish singer, Bob Geldof, organized a makeshift band called Band Aid in the hopes of raising global awareness and much needed funds. Like everyone else, I was shocked at the images that came from Africa. I was also partly consoled by the global response to the tragedy, and felt that this was a one-off, a fluke of nature, that would probably never repeat itself in my lifetime. Boy was I wrong about that last part. Concerning Ethiopia at that time, Oxfam and Human Rights Watch attributed half of the mortality to the drought and half of the deaths to an abuse of human rights. Drought and war combined to negatively affect the lives of 8 million in Ethiopia. Much of that suffering could have been avoided but wasn't leaving blood on our human hands.

It was not a one-off, a fluke as I had hoped it would be. More and more, as you know, we are seeing natural disasters repeating themselves at rates that are not just rare occasions of bad luck. They are regular, and they are right in our own country. The number of forest fires, droughts, hurricanes, and floods are more numerous, more devastating, and more global than anything we've ever experienced before. Prophets and action have never been more needed.

In the first reading, we heard from the Prophet Ezekiel who lived some 700 years before the birth of Jesus. God told Ezekiel to tell the people, all the people, to turn from their wicked ways if they hoped to avoid disaster. If Ezekiel didn't warn the people, God would not be able to save the people from the disaster, and blood would be on Ezekiel's hands. If he did warn them, and they chose not to change their minds and hearts, God would spare Ezekiel but the people would have blood on their hands. Disaster did fall upon them, their only world—their country-- was taken from them, and they had no one to blame but themselves.

Some Church leaders, like our current pope, but many more environmentalists and scientists have fulfilled the role of Ezekiel warning us of the consequences of our neglect and even reckless abuse of the earth. They have called for a unified response to the climate crisis. Yet, we don't heed their warning, we remain divided, and hope the crisis we've largely created will magically blow over. If we could unite around care for our common earth, we would even have the power of heaven to draw on. ***"Whatever you bind on earth, will be bound in heaven"*** says Jesus in today's gospel. And where two of you agree, rather than quarrelling over who's right and who's wrong, ask my Father for anything that is good and trust that He will grant your request.

Perhaps we are so wrapped up in our own happiness in this life and saving our souls in the next life, that we have lost the bigger context of the concerns and needs of the whole human family.

Back in June 2015, Pope Francis wrote one of the most important letters ever to come out of the Vatican. It's called ***Laudato Si'***, which means "Praise Be To You," and is subtitled "Care For Our Common Home." In this encyclical letter, Pope Francis was addressing not only Catholics but also people of the whole world. In the letter, he points out that ecological degradation cannot be addressed without simultaneously working for social justice and human equality on a global scale. "There is a connection," he writes, "between morality and ecology: when our human relationships suffer, our environment suffers; where the environment is wounded, human life is diminished, especially for the poor and marginalized."

Like the seasons of nature, there is also the Season of Creation, which runs annually from September 1st, the world day of prayer for the care of creation and ends on October 4th, the feast of St. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of ecology. Our diocesan Laudato Si' committee, as well as the Church itself, invites each of each of us to an ecological conversion year round. This ecological conversion involves a change in how we look at, interact, and behave to care for our common home.

While more information of how we can live this conversion will be coming forth, each of us can start right now appreciating the beauty that's already around us

and what we would like to pass on to future generations. “Ask for anything, and it will be done by my Father in heaven, and don’t forget, I am there among you.”

~Fr. Phil