Homily for Sunday, July 5, 2026

Prophets--men or women but sometimes even children--are rarely appreciated or taken seriously by their own generation. As I get older, I'm appreciating the insights of the Old Testament prophets more and more. Maybe it's seeing their humanness and the struggles they had to deal with that appeals to me. While appreciating them is fine, I also need to recognize and value the prophets who walk the earth now, sometimes in my own community or church. Prophets of old or modern-day prophets don't speak their own mind; they speak the mind of God. That's what makes what they say so important.

The Old Testament prophets Isaiah and Zechariah, who we heard from in that first reading, had powerful visions of the coming Messiah, even though they lived six and seven hundred years before the birth of Jesus. Perhaps the reason they spoke God's words, and not their own, is because they were trying to get us to imagine God's world, the Kingdom of God. It's as if they saw something, not too obvious to the rest of us, and were searching for words to describe what they saw. I might see a block of wood, but a woodcarver sees an eagle, or a bear, or an angel hiding in the block of wood just waiting to be revealed. Zechariah, in his imagination, saw a future king coming on a colt (male), the foal (one-year-old) of a donkey. Sounds a lot like Jesus, 600 years later, riding into Jerusalem on the first Palm Sunday on a donkey.

Zechariah also told us that he could imagine this humble king doing away with chariots from Ephraim and warhorses from Jerusalem and the warriors' bows and arrows being destroyed, so that peace could finally come to all the nations. Good for Zechariah for seeing that, but I'd like to see it, too. The first image I ever remember seeing on our black and white T.V. in the late 1960s was fighting in the Middle East. Very little has changed in 60 years, and I'm afraid it has made me jaded and cynical about

whether lasting peace on this planet will ever happen in my lifetime. Perhaps I need a prophet like Zechariah to restimulate my own imagination and see what he saw. Not only did Zechariah see nations at peace, but he also refused to give up seeing it, even though his eyes told him otherwise. Or perhaps I need to take more seriously the prophetic dimension of my own baptism. Afterall, were all baptized prophet (priest and king). Moreover, as Paul says in that second reading, ***"the Spirit of God who raised Jesus from the dead lives in all of us"*** and not just in the prophets of old.

There is a restlessness in each of us that keeps us moving forward towards God, towards meaning, towards fulness of life, towards some potential that we haven't quite reached. St. Augustine said it best when he said, "Our hearts are restless, O Lord, until they rest in you." I don't know if you ever ask deeper questions of yourself or touch on that quiet restlessness that is within you. Maybe you do and, like me, have a sense that the life you built, good as it is, isn't the whole of what your soul is yearning for.

Is there more to life than money, power, prestige, and security? Is there more to life than childish presidents throughout the world posturing with military parades displaying tanks and ballistic missiles? I hope I can still imagine a Messiah, not riding a warhorse, tank, or missile, but a humble donkey and offering me something else…like a future full of hope.

Jesus is so in touch with the restlessness of our hearts. He's also not naïve to the struggles and burdens we are all carrying. Just before the gospel passage we heard is story of how Jesus and his message were not welcomed in Chorazin nor in Bethsaida. If Jesus was going do more miracles in these places, he would be welcome to stay. However, if he was going to call them to repent and draw closer to God, he was no longer welcome and had to leave. Instead of lamenting the rejection he felt or even calling down fire from heaven to burn them up, Jesus does something different. He just moves on and praises God with these words, ***"I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will."*** He's grateful for the fact that there are people and minds that are open, like a child's mind, to the message he brings even if the people of Chorazin and Bethsaida were not open.

He's grateful and praises God for the little ones who don't put their trust in their own self-importance or in military might. It's the infants, those who are open to a truth bigger than their own truths and those heavily burdened that Jesus is eager to share his message with. Jesus is tight with God. He knows the Father and the Father knows him. Yet, he'll reveal this intimacy with us just for the asking. If the powerful, the elite, don't

want to hear about God's Kingdom, then Jesus tells us that God delights in sharing it with the powerless. His message has no appeal to "important" people, to people who have their own security systems, to people who seek their own glory.

Jesus sees and feels for people who are heavily burdened. He lives in a society and within a religion whose leaders have laid burdens on people. The Romans ruled with threats and heavy taxation, while the religious leader of the time, the Pharisees, laid guilt upon peoples' shoulders constantly for not living up to the 613 obligations of Jewish laws. In Jesus' time, people were constantly being put down by the Romans and made to feel unworthy to come to God.

Jesus responds to this by saying, ***"Come to me."*** "Come to me" implies, "Don't go to them." Don't go to the religious leaders (then and now in 2026) who lay guilt on you, who lay heavy burdens on you while they, themselves, don't lift a finger to help you. ***"Take my yoke"*** implies "don't take their yoke," the yoke of the law. All the law can do is remind you that if you feel good about fulfilling the demands of one law you'll, soon afterwards, feel bad about not fulfilling other laws. It's a game you can't win. As a result, you're probably not liked, and certainly not loved, by God. This only breeds scrupulosity in people who love Church laws more than they love God. Pope Leo, just yesterday, excommunicated a bunch of arch-conservative bishops and priests who were more in love with themselves and their own scrupulosity than they were in love with God and God's people.

A final thought about when Jesus says, ***"Come to me all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens."*** True enough that we can come to God with our burdens in prayer. Equally true is that God's presence is conveyed to us through ordinary people given to us when we need them most. Often, by the way these people carry their own burdens in life, they teach us how to carry ours. They point us to Jesus who doesn't promise us a life without burdens but promises to carry those burdens with us.

A woman has lost her husband, and she is terribly bereaved. She has tried many remedies to overcome her grief, but nothing seems to work. Finally, someone says that she should go see this spiritual master. He will help her with her grief. So she goes to see him and tells him about the loss of her husband and how prolonged and difficult her grieving has been.

The spiritual master tells her that he would love to help her, but he is cold. It's a chilly day and he has no wood for his fire. If she would please go and collect some wood and they could build a fire, they could talk without the chill of the day in them.

Certainly her terrible grief could be better addressed if both of them were a little warmer.

He asked her to go out and collect some sticks for the fire. There were plenty of houses around where he lived. She should go to each of them and ask for wood. He told her they were very generous people and would surely give it to her.

"But only take wood, please, from a house that has lost no one," the master said. And so the woman moved from house to house, asking for wood. As she did, however, she had to ask, "If this house has lost no one, then give me some wood."

She came back many hours later without any wood, but with her grief healed.

God doesn't give us burdens we can't handle. In fact, God doesn't give us burdens at all. What God does give us is Jesus who comes to us, directly and indirectly, and says, "Come to me, all you who are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest."

Fr. Phil