

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

Dear Parishioners:

In last Sunday's Gospel reading we heard of our Lord's return to the synagogue in His hometown of Nazareth. There Jesus let the people know that he is the Messiah, the Savior that Israel had been long waiting for. But, as we see in the Gospel for this Sunday, because of their lack of faith, they reject Jesus as a false prophet and some of them even attempt to kill Him. The people of Nazareth were wrong to doubt Him and they were wrong for trying to kill Him. However, there was one thing that they were right about. They were right to be very concerned about having what they thought was a false prophet in their midst.

The role of a prophet is to be a messenger from God. False prophets are dangerous because while claiming to speak the truth they lead people away from God. Jesus Himself warns His followers about the dangers of false prophets. In the 7th chapter of Matthew's Gospel Jesus says: Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but underneath are ravenous wolves. By their fruits you shall know them." In chapter 24 of Matthew's Gospel Jesus says that: "Many false prophets will arise and deceive many." Similar warnings about false prophets are found in the Gospel of St. Mark and in the letters of St. Peter and St. John.

Now we usually think of false prophets as bizarre people like David Koresh of Waco, Texas or the infamous Jim Jones who forced his own followers to drink poisoned Kool-Aid some years ago. These men were obviously deranged and most people recognized them as such right away. But false prophets come in subtler forms. Recently I encountered a woman who told me that she was raised a Catholic but had converted to Mormonism. Now the Mormons I've met have all been nice people and they're upstanding citizens. However, that doesn't change the fact that Joseph Smith, the founder of their religion, was a false prophet and that Mormonism has led many people away from true Christianity. For example, Mormons believe that God was actually a man until he grew up and that every man can potentially rule his own planet. Sorry ladies, but in Joseph Smith's religion you'll have to settle for living on a man's planet.

Of course false prophets are not all trying to start their own religion. Sometimes all they want to do is reshape ours. For example, there are some TV evangelists who claim that the purpose of the Gospel is to make you rich. Or at least to make them rich. Unfortunately, Catholicism is not immune to false prophecy. Through out the history of Church there have been many false prophets. Most of them have been priests or bishops who to varying degrees lost faith that the Lord was still guiding the Church. We have these false prophets among us even now. You see them on the TV whenever the media wants to challenge the official teaching of the Church. They find some dissenting priest who says that it's alright to reject the official teaching of the Church on premarital sex, contraception, abortion, divorce & remarriage, homosexuality, etc., etc. What you're seeing there is a false prophet. Someone pretending to speak for God while actually leading people away from the truth as revealed by God in the Bible and in the teachings of His Church.

Then there are the less public false prophets. These are our coworkers and friends who, while they profess to share our faith in Christ and His Church, are actually skeptics who ridicule and cast doubt on our Christian beliefs. They are so subtle about it that we hardly notice how much we are influenced by their talk.

Now since false prophets can be found everywhere, how are we to recognize false prophesy when we hear it? Addressing this question, St. John the Evangelist wrote that every spirit that acknowledges Jesus Christ come in the flesh belongs to God and those that don't belong to the devil. In other words to determine whether what you're hearing is true or false see how it measures with the teaching of Christ as found in the Bible and in His Church.

The second way we can determine whether something is true or not is the “soft and fluffy test.” Jesus warned us about false prophets by saying that they come to us in sheep’s clothing but underneath are really wolves. Sheep are soft and fluffy. So are the false teachings of the false prophets. False prophets make a living out of telling us what we want to hear. Let’s face it. None of us wants to struggle if we can avoid it. So what they say is soft and fluffy and easy to follow. It plays to our weaknesses and appeals to our lower, lazier nature. The truth on the other hand is something hard. It has to be because it must be strong enough for us to stand on and to build our lives on. True prophets and true teachings call us to be heroic, to rise to a challenge, and to live up to our dignity as the children of God.

Jesus provides us with another way of testing whether what we are being told is true or not. He says: “By their fruits you shall know them.” As we listen to those around us who suggest new ways or novel interpretations we should ask ourselves “If we follow these teachings will we be better men and women for it? Will it make us holier, more charitable, more Christ-like or not? What about the people who already follow these ways of thinking. Are they happier, holier, more charitable and Christ-like because of them? What fruit has been born from this life-style or behavior?” Yes, the people of Nazareth were wrong to reject Jesus and in trying to kill him. But they weren’t wrong about the danger of false prophets. Let us pray for the wisdom and courage to reject the false prophets that may endanger us.

With my prayers,

Fr. Conley

CATHOLIC QUOTES

“God commands you to pray, but He forbids you to worry.” St. John Vianney