

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time – 2024 B

“I will listen for what God, the LORD, has to say; surely he will speak of peace to his people.” Those words are from Psalm 85, and they zero in on the mission of the prophet in Scripture – among all the many voices in the world, to listen attentively and faithfully to what God has to say.

When you were baptized, the priest or deacon anointed you with the oil of Chrism - also used for Confirmation and ordaining priests and bishops – while saying: ***“God now anoints you with the Chrism of salvation, so that you may remain a member of Christ, Priest, Prophet and King, unto eternal life.”*** [We’ll hear those words addressed to Chance in a few minutes.] Each of you shares in the mission of Jesus, the Word made flesh. The prophetic role in particular is not about somehow predicting the future. Your prophet’s task is about hearing and speaking what God, the Lord, has to say. This is why today’s Psalm urges us so powerfully: “If today you hear His voice, harden not your hearts.” For if we don’t listen to God, we certainly cannot speak for God.

Twice the First Reading uses the phrase – I will raise up a prophet from among their kin. Why is that ***kinship*** important? The idea here is that an effective prophet is someone familiar, someone you know and trust. But even more, a true prophet is someone who will share the consequences of following the word that is spoken. Instead of simply giving advice about the way to live from a safe distance, Jesus laid down His very life ... God’s Word of Mercy not simply announced but lived in sacrificial love.. This is the root of His teaching with authority – the consistency of His Word and His Life.

That is at the heart of Catholic Education, which we celebrate this week. Catholic schools teach many skills and instruct about science and math and language and culture and history; but the most important work of Catholic education is to form disciples, to teach the next generation how to hear what God, the Lord, has to say, and how to live, learn, and cooperate in a community rooted in faith in the Word of God, with Jesus always among us.

Now to the man with the unclean spirit. We cannot be forced – by Satan or by God – to choose a certain way. But we can be misled to follow after things that appear desirable but in fact will harm us – those “empty promises” we pledge to reject in our Baptismal promises. Because of original sin, all of us will struggle with evil and sin – with unclean spirits, if you will – and we all need the authority of Jesus to rescue us. ***Those are the parts of our lives that would cry out: “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?”*** To ask for God’s help in those areas will not magically change our personalities or take away our past; but ***it will open our lives to hear what God, the Lord, has to say. And we know from this Gospel what Jesus will say to that unrest and alienation from God: Quiet! Come out of them.”*** With patience and trust, our lives can change ... even if slow and gradual, it is no less the work of God.

We are made sisters and brothers of Jesus in Baptism, so in Him we listen to a Prophet from among our own kin. Spend time each day in prayer, like Mary, sitting at the feet of Jesus. Learn from Samuel, as we heard a couple weeks ago, to say: “Speak, Lord, Your servant is listening.” We will find a greater peace of mind in the turmoil of our world when we turn off the TV, close the laptop, put down the smartphone, and open the Bible or sit in stillness to listen to the Voice of God. With confidence that this Word is living and effective in Jesus, make those words of Psalm 85 your own: “I will listen for what God, the Lord, has to say.” And ***if today you hear His voice, harden not your hearts.***