

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time – 2021 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, actively, 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.”*** Moses handed on God’s Word, but Jesus IS God’s Word, made flesh. Each of us shares in the Prophetic mission of Jesus. The role of a prophet is not about predicting the future, but about hearing and speaking what God, the Lord, has to say.

This is why the oracles of Isaiah and Ezekiel and Jeremiah and the other prophets in the Old Testament all begin with the words, “Thus says the Lord.” This is Mary’s better portion, first sitting at the feet of Jesus to listen to Him – not to avoid helping with her sister Martha’s chores but to understand first how to go about the day’s work with the inspiration of being close to God. This is why today’s Psalm urges us so powerfully: “If today you hear His voice, harden not your hearts.”

Sharing in the prophetic word of Jesus by listening for what God, the Lord, has to say, and directing our lives by that Word, is especially critical today. So many voices clamor for our attention and allegiance. It is easy even for sincere disciples to be distracted, listening to what the politicians and newscasters and advertisers and bloggers and coworkers have to say. Our time is marked with confusion, subject to so many sources of influence coupled with suspicion and fear that many are likely to believe people they have never met or even anonymous voices – “they say” or “I heard somewhere”. We know it happened to Jesus as well; He was too familiar to his neighbors and had to conclude, “No prophet is without honor except in His native place.” We do need to be informed about the needs of the Body of

Christ, but words of commentary are always to be measured against what God, the Lord, has to say, a voice that speaks of mercy, truth, redemption, peace.

Twice the First Reading uses the phrase – 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, and especially because 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 why the mission of Catholic Education, which we celebrate during Catholic Schools Week, is so invaluable. 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.

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.” Turn off the TV, close the laptop, put down the smartphone, and open the Bible. 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*.

BLESSING OF THROATS AFTER PETITIONS