

## **Homily: July 11, 2021**

By Fr. Virgil Petermeier, osc

Great to be with you. Today we celebrate our God who invites our help to speak out in accord with God's will, which must determine every aspect of our life—family life, social life, business and political life—all for the betterment of our whole world and all God's people. Yet in all honesty we know that we sometimes avoid speaking out for God's interest because we are afraid of what people may think. So, we call upon our compassionate God: "Lord have mercy!"

When we heard prophet Amos being told to just get out of Bethel and stop prophesying, we might realize that prophesying is no easy task. To really speak in the name of God and as God wills, is not easy because many times we don't want to hear what God is REALLY trying to tell us---about ourselves, about our society, about the Church, and/or about our Christian discipleship. But prophet Amos simply answers, "The Lord took me from following the flock and said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'"

In the Gospel we hear similar trouble. Jesus more than hints to his apostles he is sending out, that people might not listen to them either. In that case they should simply leave, shake that town's dust from their feet and go to another village.

Jesus himself experienced a tough time even in his hometown of Nazareth when he preached in their synagogue. First, they were amazed at his wisdom, but suddenly felt offended and drove him out. Yet, Jesus and all the prophets felt themselves sent by God to proclaim a message that would bring positive results to our world. Yet there was a hitch. Life would have to change—or in the bible's language, we have to repent. As Paul said, we have "to be holy and without blemish before God and do things that "favor the will of God" and are "for the praise of God." We need to live in accord with the truth of God—which is the truth of love—forgiving rather than hating; being patient rather than angry and judging; and to heal rather than add injury.

As Jesus sent out his fishermen apostles, expecting them to proclaim some aspect of the Gospel, so he sends you and me. Afterall, we are baptized into Jesus, the prophet, king and priest. And as we heard in the Gospel, Jesus wants us to be prophets who are free of baggage—free of material stuff that weighs us down—and free spiritually, psychologically, socially. Yet, what might be weighing you and me down? Often, we are weighed down by fear of what other people might think of us.

I always recall a young man in my second parish in Papua, Indonesia. His name was Damianus, a native of a rainforest village there. He was one of the men with whom we would prepare the Sunday homily, which he would then proclaim, not in the national language, but in the area's tribal language, which I couldn't speak well enough, but the mother tongue that really hit home for these villagers. The Gospel at this time was about Jesus' call to love our neighbor as our self.

Damianus felt called to challenge his fellow parishioners to consider changing their traditional style of thinking that had been causing difficulties in arranging marriages. Traditionally both the bride and the groom must be from one clan, and surely not from another village. Any departures from this social rule usually led to bloody village fights.

Damianus proclaimed, “We are all brothers and sisters of the same God. So, we ought not to be using this divisive language of ‘we people’ and ‘those people’ which easily makes us enemies of one another.” Of course, during the warring, headhunting days only a generation earlier, they had been enemies. As Damianus proposed wider relationships, listeners’ faces in front of him began to reflect resistance and even anger. Damianus could feel unspoken messages coming at him: “You’re one of us, how dare you talk to us like this? Who do you think you are?”

Damianus’s courage to prophetically challenge his own family, neighbors and acquaintances was amazing. This was tribal Christianity sprouting vigorously, rooted in and growing out of everyday life in the village of Yamas-Yeni. This precious burst of Bible reflection invited the Christian villagers of Yamas-Yeni to take a brave step in response to God’s Word—to appropriate the Gospel in a new way. But it wasn’t easy.

Back to us—back to you and me. We, too, are called by Jesus to speak in the name of God—to speak in the name of love—meaning, to speak for what is truly BEST for others, for our earth, and for ourselves, too. Yet, there can be fear. If I promote Covid vaccinations, what are people going to say? If I want to raise issues such as racism, immigration, abortion, death penalty, and gun laws—what are people going to say?

I now live in Phoenix, a city facing its 22<sup>nd</sup> year of drought within the context of a mega-drought expanding throughout the West. We, who live there, need to prepare ourselves for a change of lifestyle regarding use of water which is becoming less and less. We will need to give up nice green lawns and accept desert-style yards. That’s not a popular message. Another call comes from the homeless in our parks. We need find more ways to help the poor get out of poverty; we need to promote more justice for the immigrants.

Are you and I ready and willing to speak for what’s BEST for ALL in regard to these and other important issues? God, Jesus, and St. Paul continue to invite us, saying, “**Go prophesy to my people.**” That’s for you, here in Minnesota, and for me in Phoenix. “**Go prophesy to my people.**”