

## **A Future Not Our Own**

3rd Sunday of Advent

December 15, 2019

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In the religious sense, prophets are not those who can predict the future, as commonly assumed. Prophets are the ones who speak God's truth in the present moment, regardless of how it is received by the crowds. To be a prophet is a very hard life. It calls for a deep conviction to one's conscience, the ability to face resistance, and the grace of not growing bitter in the process. True prophets are few and far between.

John the Baptist was a true prophet. Speaking of John the Baptist in today's Gospel from Matthew, Jesus says, "yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way before you." But this great honor of preparing the way of the Lord came at a great price. Notice that the first line of the passage specifies that John the Baptist was in prison at this point. As we know, he was eventually beheaded and killed due to his prophetic stance.

St. James in our second reading points out two key experiences of the prophets: hardship and patience. As he writes, "take as an example of hardship and patience, brothers and sisters, the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord." The prophets experience *hardship* because they are caught between God's truth and people's anger which is directed at them. They take on the burden of doing the right thing, but being misunderstood by the crowds. The prophets experience *patience* because they oftentimes don't see the results of their labor. Sometimes their message isn't validated until after their death.

Bishop Ken Untener, the former bishop of Saginaw, Michigan, had a deep appreciation for the prophets and wrote a prayer about the prophetic spirit. This is part of that prayer:

This is what we are about. We plant the seeds that one day will grow. We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces far beyond our capabilities. We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something, and to do it very well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest. We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker. We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own.

*The prophets inspire us to endure hardships patiently for the sake of God's truth.*

Do I value God's truth over human validation?

Not all of us can be prophets like John the Baptist. It is a special calling from God that involves isolation and trust. But all of us can appreciate the prophetic spirit. As we continue with this mass, let us pray for the strength to deal with hardships and the gift of patience. Let us pray that we may spend our lives building a future that is not our own.