



Homily for 8/18/2019

20<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, C

Rev. J. David Carter, JCL

*It Is Hard to Be a Prophet*

It is hard to be a prophet.

Jeremiah in today's first reading is treated very harshly. Why? Because he tells the unpopular truth to people who don't want to hear it. His job was to tell the people of Israel that judgement has come upon them because of their sins. God had told him to tell the people. That is what makes him a prophet; a prophet is a mouthpiece for the Lord. So he told them what God wanted them to hear, not what *they* wanted to hear.

Jesus does the same. He teaches us that the way to heaven is through the cross. It is unpopular to be crucified – for what I hope are obvious reasons. Even Peter rebukes Jesus for suggesting that the Son of Man must suffer. Then Jesus rebukes Peter right back, saying, “You are thinking like men do, not as God.”

So Jesus says something pretty startling for our ears, so accustomed to softer expressions of tenderness being associated with Jesus. Namely, “Do you think that I have come to establish peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division.” And then He proceeds to describe this division in stark details: father against son, son against father, mother against daughter, and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law!

Where is He going with this, you may ask? Well the answer is that He is recalling the prophecy of Micah in the Old Testament. Micah was the Prophet who prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem but also the future restoration of Judah. As a side note, it is from Micah that we have the prophecy that the future Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. But Jesus quotes from Micah Chapter 7:

“for the son treats the father with contempt, the daughter rises up against her mother,  
the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;  
a man's enemies are the men of his own house.  
But as for me, I will look to the Lord,  
I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me.

This is given in the context of the hope that Israel had of the reunification of the twelve tribes of Israel. Before the reunification, there will be a time of strife, of division. But we are called to have hope and endurance through this division; “I will wait for the God of my salvation”. It is this theme that Jesus takes as his own. First comes the cross, then comes the resurrection. Be patient in your trials.

That, however, is the greatest hurdle we have to evangelization. It is still hard to be a prophet when God wants us to say, “Take up the cross of suffering.” We all want an easy fix. We all want immediate gratification. We all want heaven without death and the resurrection without the cross. This divides us. We are called to be on the side of the cross; and others, even our loved ones, will jeer at us and mock us and fight against us. This happens in many areas, but in our day it is most notable in the area of being a prophet of simple Christian Anthropology: men are men; women are women.

I just read an article in the *New York Post* about the death of masculinity. The author, Miranda Devine, relates that in the recent bout of violence we have seen, from knife attacks in Australia to the El Paso and Dayton shootings, there are many stories of heroism. These great tragedies have a positive side too. She relates in detail how men stepped up to the plate and came to the aid of the helpless in each of these many horrible scenes. She



says, “In every story of bloodshed and mayhem, it’s the same. Tales of selfless male heroism and chivalry emerge in the face of mortal danger. These are men who rush toward danger, risking their lives and even dying in the noble cause of protecting women and children.” We can see the good that she is getting at as the silver lining of the tragedy - there are still decent men in the world. But this is where she becomes a little prophetic and starts to shed light on something our society is starting to feel uncomfortable about. She says, “We always are quick to point to the dark side of masculinity when violence is committed, but too often we overlook the feats of bravery by men who combat it. Call it the chivalry instinct, it is what inspires men to run toward danger to protect the weak. This is the noble side of masculinity that we once would perpetuate in folklore and stories passed down from father to son about what it means to be a real man.” She goes on to say, “But in the new era of ‘toxic masculinity,’ young men are taught to ignore their heroic instincts and learn to be weak. They are instructed always to be on guard against the monster within. . . . Boys and young men are bombarded with messages pathologizing their DNA. If they look at a woman, they’re accused of leering. If they open a door for a woman, they’re sexist. Even the way they sit on the subway has been criminalized as ‘manspreading.’ The American Psychological Association formalized the new pathology earlier this year by declaring ‘traditional masculinity is psychologically harmful.’ The male attributes it fingered as most worrisome were: stoicism, competitiveness, dominance, aggression, anti-femininity, achievement, ‘eschewal of the appearance of weakness,’ adventure, risk and violence.” \*

But what will this lead to? It’s not too hard to imagine that we are about to create a society in which no one will run towards the lunatic with guns drawn and stop him in 32 seconds. We are about to create a world where women and children are less safe, because we have convinced our men that even dreaming of using their natural strength and bravery to rescue them from danger is the worst thing they can do, and so they won’t.

Now to even dare to broach the subject was brave on this woman’s part, even if it is true. For me to preach it might mean I get reported to the Bishop or to the local news for promoting “Toxic Masculinity.” What I am doing is speaking prophetically the truth about simple anthropology to an age that doesn’t want to hear it. And every believing Christian is called to do the same. It will cause division. It will cause disagreement; it may even mean jail-time for some in the future. And this is just on one subject among many! We all know there are a lot more things that pit our faith and contemporary society against each other. But it must be so for the final unification of the Kingdom! Because the Kingdom of God will not be a compromise of half-truths. It will not be a ‘middle road’ of mediocrity - heaven without the reality of hell, love without suffering, resurrection without the cross. Rather, it will be all or nothing - God or nothing! Call me crazy, but I don’t see any other way; only Jesus has the words of everlasting life. Marginalize me if you will, denounce me as a hater or divider, throw me in a cistern like the prophets of old. What are you expecting me to say - things that will please you or those things that are true? As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

\* Miranda Devine, “It’s masculinity to the rescue,” New York Post. August 14, 2019, <https://nypost.com/2019/08/14/its-masculinity-to-the-rescue/>. (accessed August 17, 2019).