

4TH SUNDAY IN OT—Year B—M01-D31-Y2021

01. Today's readings address three falsehoods that we all have to be on guard against—three falsehoods that are easy traps to fall into—three falsehoods **that threaten to undermine our relationship with God.**
02. These falsehoods are: **false prophets, false gods, and false faith.** These falsehoods, if embraced and nurtured, can bring all sorts of demons into our life — demons like **self-deception, a divided heart, and control.**
03. In the first reading, Moses addresses the first falsehood, that of false prophet—warning the people of Israel to be aware of the difference between **REAL prophets and FALSE ones**—between **trustworthy voices and deceitful ones.**
04. And this warning is just as relevant now as it was then as our modern-day culture is plagued with **all sorts of prophetic voices**—all claiming to have the solution to our problems—**all claiming to have the remedy to our fears.**
05. These voices come from various sources including **the world, the flesh, and the devil—the government, the media, and the corporate sector**—even popular opinion — and they will all try to convince us that they have **a better path to happiness, a better offer of salvation, than the one revealed by God.**
06. The prophetic voices we have to be especially on guard against **are those of our own making — voices from our own feelings, our own judgment, and our own reasoning.**
07. The messages from these voices often result in **the demon of SELF-DECEPTION — telling us the things we WANT to hear and not the things we NEED to hear —** telling us that getting our own way will lead to satisfaction and fulfillment — telling us that **all pain is pointless and all pleasure a worthy pursuit —** telling us that **a life of**

ease and comfort is to be sought, and that wealth and power will lead to security and happiness.

08. I am one who sometimes falls into the trap of listening **more to the voice of my own feelings, and my own reasoning, rather than the Voice of God—letting my emotions and my opinions determine my behaviour, rather than God’s Voice.** And both my feelings, and my reasoning, often **CONTRADICT THE VOICE OF GOD — telling me that it is possible to achieve happiness outside God’s plan for my life.**
09. But the Voice of God speaks to us **in the very depths of our heart — cutting through the faulty wisdom of our passions and our reasoning — CONTRADICTING the voice of the world, the flesh, and the devil.**
10. And to truly hear the Voice of God, and **listen to the prophets HE sends us—we have to embrace our own poverty of spirit and our own NEED for God —** we have to embrace the limitations of our OWN intellect and our OWN wisdom — we have to learn to **trust the prophets of God rather than prophets of our own making—to trust the WORD OF GOD, rather than the word of our OWN INTELLIGENCE and our OWN UNDERSTANDING. (PAUSE)**
11. In the second reading, Paul addresses **the second falsehood, that of false gods—warning the people of Corinth about the dangers of a divided heart —** a heart that is torn between **love for the one true God and love for false gods —** a heart that wants to love and serve God, but is still very much attached to the affairs of this world — **a heart that wants to please BOTH God and self.**
12. And, once again, this message is just as relevant today as it was then—as Paul exhorts us to have an **UNDIVIDED HEART — that is a pure, unrestrained love and devotion for the one true God.**
13. Because when our hearts and affections are **DIVIDED—when God is not the centre and focus of our lives—when God is not our one true love —** then things like **money, property, prestige,**

pleasure, comfort, security (and even other people) become our one true love instead, and thus the false gods that we serve—gods we use to replace the one true God, because it is simply not possible to serve two masters.

14. And as Paul describes in the second reading, **a divided heart produces anxiety, because loving these false gods will not bring us the peace and security we so desperately want**—and serving these false gods cannot bring us the salvation and hope we so desperately need.
15. And so, putting our faith in these gods, in these created goods of the world, will only make us **fearful and frustrated** — and leave us in a state of **worry and want** — because these false gods cannot fulfill **the most profound longing of our hearts, and do for us what the one and only true God can do.**
16. Of course, Paul is not talking about a **genuine concern for the created goods of this world—the goods of this world that affect our well-being and the well-being of those whom we care for** — after all, there is a healthy and holy way to be concerned about the affairs of this world.
17. Paul is talking about **being attached to the things of this world for their own sake**—because when we're attached to them in this way, we try to control them—**and in trying to control them, they end up controlling us instead** — driving us farther and farther away from the **one true God**. For the goods and pleasures of this world are meant to **lead us to God—they are not meant to replace God Himself.**
18. This is why Paul encourages us to have a heart that is committed **FIRST AND FOREMOST to knowing, loving, and serving the one true God** — a heart that is **in the world, but not of the world** — a heart that loves the world, but is not **IN LOVE** with the world — a heart that **serves the world, but is not a servant of the world** — a heart that

loves the one true God above all else, above all others, **EVEN one's own family and friends.**

19. God Himself loves us with **this kind of undivided heart—and so He wants and invites us to do the same.**
20. During my own spiritual journey, **I became keenly aware of how truly divided my own heart can be — divided between serving GOD'S INTERESTS, and my own interests.** Like many of us, I often want to have it both ways—I want to be able to serve both God's interests and my own.
21. But God simply will **not let me live this kind of compromise, and rightly so—because this kind of divided heart is not in mine, or anyone else's, best interest.**
22. And so, God is continually calling me **to die to my own interests — to die to my own agenda and my own vision for my life — to die to my own judgments and my own opinions of how things SHOULD BE.** Because **the biggest dividing wall in our hearts is often between God and self — and there is no way to truly serve both God and self at the same time. (PAUSE)**
23. Finally, in today's Gospel, Mark addresses the third falsehood we all have to be on guard against, **that of false faith — because there is a huge difference between believing God exists and believing in God Himself — between having faith ABOUT God and having faith IN God.**
24. In the Gospel reading, the unclean spirit knows and acknowledges Who Jesus is, crying out: ***I know Who You are, the Holy One of God.*** This faith expressed by the demon is a kind of false faith—one that is empty and meaningless, because it is devoid of love and trust. It is simply the profession of an objective truth—but without any subjective connection or investment IN THAT TRUTH.
25. And so, **having faith ABOUT GOD, is simply an acknowledgement that there is indeed a supreme being who governs the universe.** But believing IN God and having faith in Him demands FAR MORE FROM US. Having faith **IN God is about a living,**

loving relationship with this Supreme Being — a relationship of trust, where we allow God to be the master of our lives—and where we trust His voice over and above the other voices we hear. Because it is possible to believe that God exists, and still have no true faith and trust in Him, just like the unclean spirit in today’s Gospel.

26. And control is really at the heart of this issue — the kind of control that **acknowledges God’s existence, but effectively pushes Him out of our lives because we want to play the role of God ourselves.** But, AGAIN, true faith is not just about believing God exists, because even the demons do as much. TRUE FAITH is about a **loving, trusting relationship with God, where we allow Him to govern our lives, and rule our hearts.**
27. In other words, **if we don’t give God His proper place in our lives and in our hearts—if we don’t allow God to be actively involved in guiding our day to day affairs—if we don’t have a true living relationship with God—then our faith is as false and empty as the demon in today’s Gospel —** because having earnest religious beliefs is POINTLESS, if we continue to play God ourselves — and because it is **ENTIRELY POSSIBLE to believe in God, and still live independent of Him—relying exclusively on our own strength, our own resources, and our own abilities.**
28. It’s not easy to surrender our lives to God’s dominion—to **allow ourselves to be completely and utterly dependent on Him—to entrust all our cares and concerns to His loving care —** because false prophets often tell us that **being in control and seeking personal power is a good thing** which will guarantee our survival and our salvation. **And so, we can get deluded about our own ability to run our lives, and to control our circumstances.**
29. This is ALSO something I struggle with, for a big part of me **is still very much convinced that I can run my own life, and govern my own affairs, without God’s intervention—that I’m very much in control of my own life—and that I can live my life without much help from God.**

For although I believe in God, **I sometimes live my life as if everything depends on me, and not on Him.**

30. But today, God invites us **to put our trust and faith in Him—to surrender control of our lives to Him—to surrender our cares and worries to Him.** Especially in these challenging times, **as there is so much about this pandemic that is outside our control.**

31. Every day God entrusts Himself to us on the Altar **as the very bread we eat—as the very nourishment of our souls—as the very remedy for our hunger and our longing.** Let us entrust ourselves to Him in return — **embracing our powerlessness and our total dependence on Him — trusting that He has nothing but our best interest at heart**—and that HE has both the power and the desire to bring that about. **AMEN.**