

Saturday's Thought for the Day 29 August 2020

Today the Church commemorates the beheading of the prophet John the Baptist. John was imprisoned by Herod for opposing his marriage to his brother's wife. At a banquet Herod was forced by his own words to give the head of John on a dish to the daughter of Herodias, Herod's wife. I want to devote today's thought to prophecy.

We learn a lot about it in the Old Testament. The prophets first were called by God out of events in their lives for example, Amos was called out of his everyday work as herdsman and dresser of sycamore trees, Hosea, out of his marriage breakdown, Isaiah, out of his vision of God in the Temple, Jeremiah, from the days of his youth.

Next their message was based on what was happening at the time. Mostly their message was one of pointing out to people the consequences of their evil lives and what the result would be: God's punishment of exile to a foreign land. You can imagine how unpopular they were. They were often opposed by false prophets. The difference between the two was that the message of God's prophets proved true in the end, although Isaiah's messianic prophecies were only fulfilled when Jesus came. The truth of the prophets' message was important to prove their authenticity.

Prophecy plays an important part in the New Testament. Jesus is the Prophet and his message about the Kingdom of God and how to enter it was being fulfilled in his day. Jesus was not always popular because he said things people did not want to hear. It cost him death on the Cross, but the Resurrection proved Jesus's words and works true. Even after Pentecost prophecy continued: in the Acts of the Apostles we read of Peter and the apostles refusing to obey the Jewish authorities of not teaching in Jesus's name.

St Paul speaks of prophecy as a spiritual gift in 1 Corinthians 12. Prophecy played a part in the life of the Church then because it brought people's attention to what God was doing and saying at that particular time.

So what about today! The best prophet we have in the Church is Pope Francis. He gave an interview published in the Easter issue of the Tablet in which he saw Lent and Eastertide in the pandemic as a moment of creativity and conversion for the Church, for the world, and for the whole of creation. He was truly being prophetic in his interpretation of what was happening in the Covid-19 crisis. May his thoughts and insights bear fruit in the Church and in the world.

We also need prophets at the local level: people who can interpret what is happening in the local church as to whether it is God's way. What is God saying to us in the precautions we are taking in avoiding the spread of the virus through our worship?

The right questions about our present situation can only be answered by prayer and being in a close relationship with God. Prophets are people who can take us forward in our search for an answer.

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