

HOMILY FOR THE 13TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, JUNE 29, 2020.

Called to be Prophets and Witness of God's love.

Whoever does not take up his cross is not worthy of me (Matthew 10:38). Whoever receives you receives me (Matthew 10:40).

Dear brothers and sisters,

Happy Sunday to you all! Last Sunday's gospel concluded on a very somber note, Our Lord had clearly stated, "Everyone who acknowledges me before others I will acknowledge before my heavenly Father. But whoever denies me before others, I will deny before my heavenly Father" (Matthew 10:32-33). What can we do to acknowledge the Lord before others so that he may acknowledge us before our heavenly Father? Answering this question leads to the heart of our vocation as Prophets like Elisha and witnesses of God's love, like the Shunamite woman and her dear husband. To be a prophet and to be a witness of God's love are the same. The key verses are "Whoever does not take up his cross is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10:38). "Whoever receives you, receives me" (Matthew 10:40).

What can we do to acknowledge the Lord before others? It is to be his prophets and witnesses in the world. Who is called to be a prophet? Is it possible that you can be called

to be a prophet, a witness to God's love? Is it possible to be an accountant, lawyer or priest and still be a prophet? What does a prophet do? Paul worked for a living, he was a tentmaker. Nonetheless he, too, was a prophet. Luke was a doctor and he too was a bearer of the good news.

We all are called to be prophets. There is no way of escaping it and it is not wise to attempt shirking or escaping. Remember the story of Jonah. Being a prophet is not simply an added extra to your life. It is part and parcel of your very being. You are called and you are sent. You live your prophetic role in and through your profession and in your life. Even when you retire or switch jobs you do not stop being a prophet. How did we become prophets? The Lord calls each one of us by name. "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you" (Jeremiah 1:5).

We are made in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:27). In Baptism, the vocation to be a prophet is made visible and palpable. This is because through baptism we are incorporated into Christ, the prophet, priest and king. Cows and Buffalos are neither baptized nor called to be prophets because they are not made in the image and likeness of God. Human beings are. The Lord expressly called us to be his ambassadors to the world. The Bible

makes this clear, "So we are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us" (2 Corinthians 5:20).

What is the work of a prophet? The Scripture tells us, "And you, child, will be called prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give his people knowledge of salvation" (Luke 1:76). Prophets reveal the will of God in our lives. A prophet bears God's message and does what God wants done. He listens to God. The readings today have examples. In the first reading, Elisha is the epitome of a prophet. The Shunamite woman and her husband are also prophets, but in a different way. Elisha succeeded the prophet Elijah (2 Kings 2:9-15). As a guest at the home of the Shunamite couple, Elijah interceded for them and God gave them a son. When this son died, Elisha prayed and God restored him back to life (2 Kings 4:32-37). He did other miracles like making a death-dealing water wholesome, he multiplied the oil of the widow so that she could sell them and pay her debtors and thereby saved the widow's sons from being enslaved (2 Kings 2:19-22, 4:1-7). He also multiplied loaves for hungry people and cured Naaman of his leprosy (2 Kings 4:42-44, 5:9-13). Elisha was true to his name meaning God is my salvation. The Shunamite couple had welcomed Elisha into their home, fed him and gave him a room to lodge. They received a prophet because he was a prophet. In that way, they received God. They gave Elisha not only a cup of cold water but perhaps, cornbread, greens, fried

chicken, sweet potatoes and greens. That was their way of carrying out their prophetic calling. They witnessed God's love to Elisha through their hospitality and generosity. When you take your grandchild under your care or receive into your home a person who needs help, did you receive a prophet? Yes, you did. Did you receive God? Yes, you did. "Whatever you did to least of my brethren you did unto me, says the Lord.

In the gospel, the twelve disciples whom our Lord summoned and sent out to evangelize are prophets. The Lord told them plainly. "Whoever does not take up his cross is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10:38). "Whoever receives you receives me" (Matthew 10:40). What is this cross they are to carry? The cross sums up everything required for patterning our lives according to that of our Lord. The cross embraces the holiness of life, requiring mortification and renunciation. The Church Fathers teach, "The way of perfection passes by way of the Cross. "There is no holiness without renunciation and spiritual battle (2 Tim 4). Spiritual progress entails the self-discipline [asceticism] and mortification that gradually lead to living in the peace and joy of the Beatitudes" (CCC 1015).

To be prophets, we must be ready to give up our comforts and carnal desires to do what is right and just. We cannot give God a second or third place in our lives. This is why the Lord says, "Whoever loves father or mother more than

me is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10:37). To try to love parents more than the Lord is to love them the wrong way. This is because God is God and we can never put him on the same par with human beings. Our priorities should be; we love God, we love our parents and we love other people in God. Otherwise we make idols of these persons and that does not help our vocation to be witnesses to God's love.

Our Lord commissioned the Apostles to be his messengers because he saw the need in the world. The work of being a prophet or witness of the Lord is borne out of God's compassion. "At the sight of the crowds, his heart was moved with pity for them because they were troubled and abandoned, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36). This led to the Lord's sending out of the Apostles to bring his love to his people. A prophet is a messenger of God's mercy and love.

Sometimes, we may say, "How I wish that God would speak to me as he spoke to Isaiah, Jeremiah, Elijah, Elisha or John the Baptist!" The truth is that he speaks through the circumstances of our time. What we need are open hearts and minds. A prophet's vocation is not always easy. But we must remember the assurance of the Lord: "Have no fear before them, because I am with you to deliver you, says the LORD" (Jeremiah 1:8).

