

July 8, 2018 14<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

There was a couple, they'd been very devout in their prayer life and in the practice of their faith. When they turned 60 years old (which happens to me in October and I hope it happens to me like this), God appeared to them and said, "What would you like me to do for you?" The woman said, "God, I would like a Broadway ticket package: airline tickets, hotel, restaurants and tickets to a show." God said, "That's fine." And boom! she had it, two tickets. Her husband just looked at her incredulously, he couldn't believe that she asked for that. God's said, "What do you want?" He said, I want a woman 30 years younger than me. God said, "Okay" and turned him into a 90-year-old man.

Today we talk about prophecy and being prophets. All three readings alluded to this. An interesting thing is, by virtue of our baptism we are baptized into three different categories: priest, king and prophet. We don't think about this much, because we don't see how it's relevant to our lives. We're going to talk about being a prophet today because all of us are prophets. We might think, in the modern sense prophecy is about telling the future but it's really not. Prophecy has always been, until recent times, about letting people know the will of their God. Prophets would tell them what God wants them to do. If they had a pagan god there were prophets to the pagan God. In the old times in Israel, we had prophets to our God.

We read from Ezekiel today that he lived in the southern kingdom. Israel was divided into two; southern/northern. And the Holy Spirit came upon him and set him on his feet. That means God came upon him and made him start out to the northern kingdom, he didn't have a choice. He kept telling God, "I don't want to go." God says, "You're going, be strong." So he went up to the northern kingdom and he told them, they were disobeying God. And their disobedience, their lack of charity to the poor, their disregard for life, was going to get them into trouble. There's a certain thing about prophets, that they're not popular. People don't like to hear the truth because it gets our consciences going and we like to be in our own rut. We like to justify our actions. So, Ezekiel was not happy about being unpopular but God would not release him. So when the people didn't listen they were sent in bondage and taken into exile, Ezekiel got caught up in that too. He had to live with the fact that he was a prophet. Not always an easy life, not always an easy thing to do.

St. Paul in our second reading a prophet, he was an evangelist but he was also a prophet. He says, "I have a thorn in my side from the angel of Satan. A thorn that I can't get rid of." We think that it was one of two things, nobody knows, much has been written. We think it was a physical impediment, maybe stuttering like Moses did or it could be a sin, concupiscence that he couldn't get rid of. He asked God three times to take it away because it was getting in the way of him doing what he needed to do. God said, "No, my grace, my mercy, is enough for you." Now we get another idea of part of being a prophet, it's not comfortable. But we also see something else, people come to me and say in confession, "Father, bless me Father for I have sinned, it's the same old sins Father." Like I know what your same old sins are. You give me more credit than I deserve. But I have to say, "Okay, now name them. You can't tell me just the same old sins Father." People get upset, they get frustrated with that. But you have to remember we have to keep going; holiness is a lifelong pursuit, it doesn't happen overnight. The thing is, where there is sin there is God's mercy. God did not just tell St. Paul that I'm not going to take away your sin because then how am I going to show you my mercy. He told another saint as well, I forget the name, but he said

the same thing. If I take away your sins, I cannot assure you my mercy. So, St. Paul shows us being a prophet is uncomfortable.

Jesus shows us the greatest challenge of being a prophet and that is: nonacceptance in your own hometown, in your own family, in your own community. They're not going to accept you because, "Wait a minute we know you, we were there when you were raised. Remember that time you got into trouble? And now you're going to tell us that you work for God?" That happens to a priest a lot of times. We will run into somebody who hasn't seen us since college or high school. "You're a priest? "It's like it's the most impossible thing that could ever have happen and it happened. "Yes" I have one priest that tells me, he says, "You know what the most uncomfortable thing is? When you're up there preaching and all the sudden one of your old girlfriends comes into Mass." I don't know, all my exes are in Texas. True. So Jesus shows us that the worst thing is that your family and your friends, your community, can't accept you as working for God. Now, all of us are called to point out irregularities in others' lives that are getting in the way of the salvation of their immortal soul. All of us by virtue of our baptism, we have to tell our kids we have to tell our grandkids. Is it going to be popular? Heck no, they're not going to want to hear it, but what happens? We plant a seed. We plant a seed and then once we tell them, we can move on. We keep praying. St. Paul says, "If I don't tell you the sin that you're sinning then it's my fault and it comes back on me. I'm guilty of your sin. But if I tell you, and you don't listen, it's your fault because I told you, I planted the seed.

Now, we have a group and people don't usually think this way about this group in our church. But we have a group of men that are prophets. We have another title for them, bishops. "Father, how is the bishop a prophet?" Well, you have to look at what happens to them. As a priest ordained into the diocese of Tucson, I know the boundaries of where I'm going to ever live, the diocese of Tucson, southern part of Arizona. I know the priests that I grew up with, literally, we were ordained together we grew up together. I know them, they know me, I don't have to prove anything. "Ah that's just Father Branson." So we don't have to do that. But, with a bishop, a hand comes out from Rome and grabs him, and it takes him out of his home diocese, out of his hometown where his family is, where the priests he grew up with are, all of his friends, everything and moves him to another diocese in another part of the country. That diocese doesn't know him from Adam. He has to come in there, everybody's expecting him to come down like a hammer. Some do some don't, they're all different. But the reason he's a prophet is, he comes in from the outside and he sees what we don't see because were living in the midst of it. He sees where the diocese needs to change. He sees how it can improve. He sees how to get us out of our ruts. The worst thing you can do is try and get a pastor out of his rut. We're just very obstinate about that. we have a hard time with that, but we promise obedience. So bishops coming in are a good thing. If they were to stay in their home diocese nobody would listen to them. "We knew you when, who do you think you are?, etc." These men come in and that's the office of bishop. To be a prophet to be planted somewhere you don't know. Bishop Weisenburger came in November and he had to get new doctors and dentists, new this new that. He had to inherit staff from another Bishop that he didn't put in place and work with them. He had to inherit priests in southern Arizona that are totally different from priests in Kansas or Oklahoma City and work with them. He's doing a good job, he was overwhelmed at first, of course. In Salina, he had 44,000 Catholics, here he's got 10 times that many so it's a much bigger operation. He's doing very well except for physical health. I had lunch with him on Friday. A very good man. But, were trying to outdo each other in injuries and surgeries, he and I. I'm going to win eventually I think, I'm not sure. But I went in and I thought, oh great he went to the dental office this morning to

get his teeth cleaning, is he going to be in a good mood? You never know what the dentist can do to you. Well it turned out he also went to physical therapy because he's damaged his back. He couldn't get out of the chair, couldn't bend over. We had a little meeting, talked about some things, got to know each other a little better and then for the second time he says, (and this is why I like him), "Want to go to lunch?" You can tell he was a pastor of a parish. We like to do our best work over lunch. So we walked downtown and had lunch, it was a great time. But to think that these men have to come in and deal with that and do that, we have to think about it. That's why we pray for them at every Mass, they are prophets. They come in and they try to make the diocese better, more holy, because they can see what we can't see. It's the same thing for all of us. We can look at another person, our friends our family and we can see things that they can't see. We become blind to ourselves. We can say, "Hey look, I love you, I'm concerned about you, you're not doing how I raised you or you're not doing what the church teaches. You know, God loves you too, why don't you stay with Him, come back to church. All these things and more, make us prophets. We don't have to get on the street corner with a big sign that says THE END IS NEAR. We just have to show love and concern about immortal souls. About the way their living today. That's all it takes. An example is the bishop that we have today in our diocese is very compassionate and understanding. This is what prophecy is all about, is it popular? Heck no. Is it comfortable? No. Can it get you killed? Well, yeah sometimes. I don't think any of us are going to have that problem. But we need to be doing it because we were baptized Christian and as followers of Christ, we prophesize. That's the only way to save our soul and somebody else's

God bless you