

The Prophets

The popular notion of a “prophet” is one who foretells events. But when we turn to the Bible it is important to appreciate that a biblical prophet is the bearer and interpreter of the Word of God. This means that a prophet has to have some close mystical encounter with God as a result of which the prophet proclaims a message to the people.

The prophet normally uses standard human language to share the message but sometimes the message is communicated by the life or actions of the prophet. Such symbolic actions are not uncommon in the body of literature in the Bible known as “The Prophets”.

As is common in the Hebrew Scriptures, prophets make use of many forms of expression. They may write in poetry or in prose, they may use sermons, proverbs, psalms, love songs, laments or any available form of expression.

Some prophets are designated as “major” because of the length of their written works, others are called “minor” because their written work is short. It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of the Prophets in terms of salvation history or in terms of their relevance in the growth of our spiritual lives.

What is of first significance is the message(s) the prophets carry. These messages are addressed to the chosen people, but some are also addressed to all nations. In addition to the messages, the prophets often do predict the future and the verification of their predictions confirms their message.

In our Bible, 18 prophets are listed (6 major and 12 minor). While many specific messages are communicated, it is possible to say that their messages fall into three categories:



Isaiah's lips anointed by fire, by Benjamin Franklin (18th C)

Monotheism: The belief in one supreme deity emerges slowly in the history and literature of the chosen people. It is the great message of many of the prophets that Yahweh is not only “One” but infinitely holy (transcendent) and surprisingly close (immanent). God is a God of mystery expressed in Covenant love.

Morality: The prophets deal extensively with sin. In their writings they rage against the infidelities of Israel and expound a religion of the heart. There is no mistaking the holiness of the Law received on Sinai and to be lived in daily life.

Messianism: In some form or other all the prophets look forward to the coming of a Messiah who will bring salvation. Despite the sins of the people, the vision of a kingdom of justice, love and peace is never extinguished even when the kind of Messiah to be expected is refined in surprising ways.

Some of the greatest literature ever written, which is at the same time deeply inspiring, is to be found in the Prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures. In the Prophets too, we find the most challenging texts about social responsibility in the face of rampant oppression of the poor.

The major prophets are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Baruch, Ezekiel and Daniel; the minor prophets are Amos, Hosea, Micah, Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, Obadiah, Joel, and Jonah.

If you have a Bible with introductions to the individual books, it will greatly help your appreciation of the Prophets. The Internet, of course, will also provide useful introductions to the various Prophets. Worth referring to when the first reading at Mass is from one of the Prophets.

SUNDAY MASS

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON:

See, I have God for my help. The Lord sustains my soul. I will sacrifice to you with willing heart, and praise your name, O Lord, for it is good.

FIRST READING: Wisdom 12:13, 16-19.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: Psalm 86.

RESPONSE:

O Lord, you are good and forgiving.

- O Lord, you are good and forgiving, full of mercy to all who call to you. Give ear, O Lord, to my prayer, and attend to my voice in supplication. **R**
- All the nations you have made shall come; they will bow down before you, O Lord, and glorify your name, for you are great and do marvellous deeds, you who alone are God. **R**
- But you, O God, are compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, O Lord, abundant in mercy and fidelity; turn and take pity on me. **R**

SECOND READING: Romans 8:26-27.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION:

Alleluia, alleluia! Blessed are you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have revealed to little ones the mysteries of the kingdom. Alleluia.

GOSPEL: Matthew 13:24-43.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON:

The Lord, the gracious, the merciful, has made a memorial of his wonders; he gives food to those who fear him.

THE WEEK AHEAD

Live the Word

Mon 20 Jul (St Apollinaris, BM)

Micah 6:1-4.6-8; Psalm 50; Matthew 12:38-42

Micah's words can reveal in many of us a jarring conflict: about what I want, and what God wants of me. Reflect on them, for they are words to live by every day of the year.

Tue 21 Jul (St Lawrence of Brindisi, PrD)

Micah 7:14-15.18-20; Psalm 85; Matthew 12:46-50

If we do God's will, we can then regard ourselves a part of Jesus' extended family – brother, sister, mother. Of course, the Father's will is that we love – God, ourselves, one another. Do we qualify?

Wed 22 Jul ST MARY MAGDALENE

Song of Songs 3:1-4; Psalm 63; John 20:1-2.11-18

Women in Mary Magdalene's time had little status in society, yet Jesus chose to reveal himself first to her, and chose her to bring a message to his followers, earning her the title, "Apostle to the Apostles."

Thu 23 Jul (St Bridget, R)

Jeremiah 2:1-3.7-8.12-13; Psalm 36; Matthew 13:10-17

Through our life experiences God gives each of us personal parables to share – stories about the familiar that teach lessons about God. Be open to recognise God's presence in your life experiences.

Fri 24 Jul (St Sharbel MakhluF, Pr)

Jeremiah 3:14-17; Jer 31:10-13; Matthew 13:18-23

It is up to us to prepare the soil of our souls to receive the seed of God's Word. Only when the ground is willing will the seeds grow into strong and beautiful virtues in our lives. Hear the parable of the sower!

Sat 25 Jul ST JAMES, A

2 Corinthians 4:7-15; Psalm 126; Matthew 20:20-28

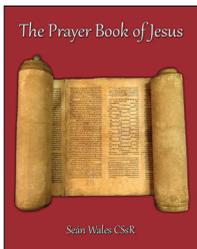
Instead of letting them get him down, Paul brags about his sufferings and hardships, rejoicing that they are a part of his life. He says they bring him closer to Jesus, and brings him peace and purpose.

Sun 26 Jul 17TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

1 Kings 3:5.7-12; Psalm 119; Matthew 13:44-52

Spend your quiet time today reflecting on how much God has richly blessed your life. May your prayer today be one of quiet gratitude and thankfulness.

(KEY: SOLEMNITY; FEAST; Memorial; (Optional Memorial) B=Bishop; M=Martyr; Pr= Priest; D=Doctor; R=Religious; A=Apostle)



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The Prayer Book of Jesus, the Psalms, has remained throughout Jewish and Christian history as a deep well of inspiration for individuals and communities at prayer. This little introduction is offered as a help to using the very prayers used by Jesus. In the Book of Psalms we are taught how to use the Word of God as our prayer and how to turn to God in any situation. The text is presented in a way that invites us to actually ponder and pray the psalms we are reading about. A must have for anyone who prays the Office daily.