

Home Grown Prophets
July 4, 2021, Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Gospel of Mark 6:1-6
Fr. John

It used to be said that an 'expert' was defined as anyone who came from at least fifty miles away carrying a briefcase. Nowadays, it's someone who comes from at least 1000 km away wielding a laptop computer and a whole pile of University Doctoral degrees behind their name.

I don't say that to be disparaging of higher education. We certainly need people who have the academic abilities to provide learned insights into the various areas of human endeavour.

Biblically however, people who provided such insights were not referred to as 'experts' but rather as prophets. But not prophets, in the modern sense of predicting future events, but rather clarifying and clearly articulating the meaning of contemporary, situations of the day. Further to this, true biblical prophets were not self-appointed, but had their calling from God. In some cases, knowing the fate of those called to this role, some even tried to beg off from this call.

In today's readings, we have God's invitation to Ezekiel to be His spokesperson and return the people of Israel to honour the covenant that He had with them. And in the gospel reading, Jesus, in his prophetic role, proclaims the gospel to his own town's people of Nazareth. Both had their work cut out for them. The Israelites rejected Ezekiel because his message was too blunt, and the people of Nazareth did likewise to Jesus, simply because he was a 'local boy' and they had the idea [as often we do] that prophets and experts have to always come from 'away' [as the Maritime people would put it] to be authentic.

And here lies the crux of the problem: Are we always looking for the God Who is 'out there'? St. Augustine, one of the greatest doctors of the Church and who came to faith halfway through his life said: '[Lord], You were within me, but I was outside and it was there that I searched for you.' God is always present to us but we are not always present to God. [One writer put it more colourfully by saying that God is not more present in church than in a drinking bar but we are generally more present to God in church than we are in a drinking bar. The problem of presence is not with God but with us.

Familiarity often blinds us to the beauty of those things that are around us and within us. Perhaps as we now emerge from a fifteen month pandemic and all the restrictions that it has placed upon us, we will begin to appreciate more those things which seemed so ordinary and commonplace before.

A year ago in the middle of March, when all the shutdowns were beginning to take place, Fr. Brad and I with some technical help did a short video which we put on the parish YouTube Channel. One of the remarks that we shared was that we were entering a time of exile... a period in which we would be away from home and all 'home' represents. Well now that time of exile is coming to an end. It's time to come home again.

In the larger picture, like the young Augustine, we are sometimes away from ourselves, strangers to our own experience, seeking outside of ourselves something that is already inside of us. The trick is to come home.

God and the moment don't have to be searched out and found. They are already here. And we need to be here.

Karl Rahner, one of the great theologians of the Second Vatican Council was once asked if he believed in miracles. His answer: 'I don't believe *in* them, I *rely on* them to get me through each day!'

Indeed miracles are always present within our lives. The question is: Are we?