

26th Sunday Ordinary Time 2024 (2)

'Oh, if only all the people were prophets!' (Moses)

I used to tell my university students that you know you have become a social scientist 'when you become a pain in the neck, in the pub!' So much hot air can be blown down the 'local', with sweeping statements in abundance. However, when someone then has the audacity to question this stereotyping and asks 'The 4 Ws', **Who** says so, **what** did they actually say, **why** did they say it and most importantly **what** is the evidence to support the opinion expressed, it is usually met with a daggered stare.

This is exactly the role of The Prophet as expressed in today's First Reading from Numbers. A Prophet is one who speaks on behalf of God, speaking The Truth and bringing us back to The Sacred Covenant with God. Their words can often be uncomfortable for us and shake us out of our apathy and straighten out our wayward ways. Prophets can be right 'pains in the neck.' and Moses wished that there were more of them like Eldad and Medad, 'If only the whole people of the Lord were prophets, and the Lord gave his Spirit to them all!'

St James, the Apostle and Bishop of Jerusalem speaks out prophetically to The Early Church. James doesn't 'mince his words' and warns those whose focus is on money and fine possessions, 'Start crying, weep for the miseries that are coming to you. Your wealth is all rotting, your clothes are all eaten up by moths. All your gold and your silver are corroding away...'. Such words will undoubtedly disturb those who lead such lives, having little or no concern for the poor, the broken and the vulnerable. James was clearly following the example of Jesus in his poverty and simplicity of life and calling his flock, Christ's followers, to a similar lifestyle.

In today's Gospel from St Mark Jesus, The Prophet par excellence, 'shoots straight from the shoulder'. When some of his disciples try to stop a man from outside their group casting out demons in his name, Jesus rebukes them saying, 'You must not stop him: no one who works a miracle in my name is likely to speak evil of me. Anyone who is not against us is for us. Anyone who is an obstacle to bring down one of these little ones who have faith, would be better thrown into the sea with a great millstone round his neck.....'

As I've often said before one wise old priest told me many years ago, reiterating the thoughts of Moses 3300 years ago, 'John there are many priests and many teachers but there are not enough prophets!' When will we ever learn? It is my belief that we have never had such a need for prophets, to bring us back to Christ's example, than there is in The Church today.