



Archdiocese of San Antonio
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Homily – Oblate de Mazenod Conference

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In our popular culture someone is considered a prophet or prophetess if he or she correctly predicts the future or, at least, claims to predict the future. In the Scriptures a prophet is someone who speaks on God's behalf about what is happening in the present rather than the future. At times, a prophet is inspired by the Holy Spirit to point out the people's failings in their relationships with God and with one another. At other times, a prophet announces God's continuing love for his people. However, in both kinds of prophecies there are future consequences for how the people respond to God's word spoken through a prophet – either blessings or curses.

In our first reading from the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses lays out two criteria for deciding whether a prophecy is authentic, whether or not it actually comes from God. If the prophetic word is confirmed in history -- and if it is consistent with all God's other words as set forth in Scripture and

focused both on exclusive worship of the one God and on social justice -- it is authentic.

The gospel is about past events but also includes future predictions. Moreover, it is the living word of God – it is addressed to us in our own circumstances. It blends past, present, and future into an encounter here and now with the risen Lord and God’s kingdom.

In today’s gospel Jesus is teaching about God’s word in a synagogue, God’s house. Jesus is known as the carpenter’s son. Has he studied the Scriptures as carefully as the scribes, the official interpreters of God’s word? Jesus belongs in the synagogue, but an evil spirit does not. Jesus is interrupted by the shriek of the unclean spirit: “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us?” Jesus silences the demon with one word and orders him to leave the man. With a loud cry and convulsing the man, the demon departs. The congregation is amazed and puzzled by this dramatic event. Jesus is not like the erudite scribes; he teaches with authority that can command and overcome demons! Is Jesus, perhaps, the expected “Prophet like Moses” announced in the Book of Deuteronomy?

This year's Oblate de Mazenod Conference focuses on Pope Francis and *Evangelii Gaudium*. Today's readings offer us a framework for examining the vision and message of the Holy Father. He has captured the entire world's attention with his honesty and courage in pointing to the serious problems of the world, focusing especially on the poor and the vulnerable and calling on all of us to reach out to encounter, dialogue, and assist them. He also proclaims a gospel of God's love, compassion, and mercy.

Pope Francis practices what he preaches. His gestures reveal his underlying attitude and pastoral sensitivity that are consistent with his teaching. There is no question about his orthodoxy or the continuity with the teachings of his predecessors. But his style is different, and the whole world is paying close attention and learning about the Christian life through his compassion, his deep faith, his simplicity, his joy. Moreover, he consistently deflects attention to himself to focus people on the Lord and God's mercy.

Blessed Paul VI pointed out what happens when we give authentic Christian witness by our lives, as Pope Francis does. When we:
radiate in an altogether simple and unaffected way [our] faith in

values that go beyond current values, and [our] hope in something that is not seen and that one would not dare to imagine, through this **wordless witness**...Christians stir up irresistible questions in the hearts of those who see how they live: Why are they like this? Why do they live I this way? What or who is it that inspires them? Why are they in our midst? (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 21)

On the other hand, the power of evangelization is considerably diminished if those who proclaim the gospel are divided among themselves in all sorts of ways. If the gospel we proclaim is seen to be torn by doctrinal disputes, ideological polarizations, or mutual condemnations among Christians – or among Catholics within the Church -- how can those whom we address in our preaching fail to be disturbed, disoriented, even scandalized (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 77)? Or perhaps they simply dismiss us as hypocritical and irrelevant because we do not practice the faith, hope, and love that we preach. We must experience constant conversion – change of mind, heart, attitude -- to live what we proclaim.

Jesus points the way by proclaiming God's word with authority, passion, and boldness. Let us not be afraid to imitate him!