

Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year A

Ez 33:7-9
Ps 95:1-2, 6-7, 8-9
Rom 13:8-10
Mt 18:15-20

Kevin M. DePrinzio, O.S.A.

When we hear the word “prophet” in everyday life, we typically think of a person who has some insight into the future, who can predict what will be; perhaps, even, a fortune teller of sorts. It is rare that we think of the people from the Hebrew Scriptures, like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel that were called by God to deliver a message.

In fact, they don’t fit the bill anyway.
They weren’t fortune-tellers of any sort;
they were people who reminded others of God’s faithfulness.
They didn’t predict the future; they spoke of the here and now.

Whatever the case may be, it’s rare for us to think that a prophet could actually be real *now*.

That’s what the people in Ezekiel’s day thought too.
No one thought that a prophet could be real and have anything necessary to say to them.
The People of Israel were well into the Babylonian exile, not having much hope of anything.
Why should they believe Ezekiel over anyone else?
What hope-filled future could he have to offer them,
a people very much in despair, feeling punished and abandoned?
And yet, Ezekiel persevered
and brought to the people messages of hope on which to hold while exiled from their homeland, during what they thought was an exile from God.

God tells Ezekiel in our first reading to continue to be a prophet,
even when the people are no longer in exile.
Even more, God tells him that the fate of the people lies in Ezekiel’s
to continue to care and watch over them.
This is quite the responsibility,
for it concerns not the people’s heeding his messages.
It concerns Ezekiel’s perseverance in his own call to continue to speak the truth.
As Christians, as members of Christ’s Body, we are called to continue the legacy of such a prophet as Ezekiel, to be prophets in our own day and *to persevere* in that call.
We are called to be people who speak the truth, the truth that is Christ Jesus himself.
It is a truth that is not always easy to speak.

As Matthew reminds us in the Gospel,
it is a truth that sometimes calls us to task and to mutual accountability,

No matter how difficult it may be, it is each person's responsibility
to watch over the members of the Christian community.
It is not the task of one or a few. It is the task of each and every one of us.

This task was near and dear to Augustine, who wrote about in his *Rule*,
who preached about it in his sermons,
who himself bore the burdens of the Christian community.
It's easy to speak the truth "generically" to a group of "others"
whom we may not know well, those with whom we may not be close.
Today, however, we are reminded of our call to speak the truth to those closest to us.

What is it that God wants us to speak?

Who are those to whom we are to speak?

Who are those we are to watch over, those to whom we are bound?

What's more, what is it that we ourselves may need to hear spoken to us?

In what ways are we to be called to task?

Perhaps, the challenge of the gospel is not to be just the *speakers* of truth,
but the *listeners* of the truth spoken to us – even more difficult of a task!

My sisters and brothers, let us keep in mind what St. Paul knew so well
was behind the truth we are to speak and hear:
the motivation of love.

The love of God and therefore the love of neighbor are what forces the truth to come out.

Love is to be our motivation to be the prophets of our own day.

The Eucharist that we celebrate, the table around which we gather,
the Body and Blood of Christ that we are to consume
is what binds us to each other, that calls us deeper and deeper into Truth itself.
May we continue to be so bold as to say Amen to It.