



Contributed by Father Raphael Ma, C.R.

Father Raphael professed first vows as a Resurrectionist on August 15th 2015, and was ordained a Priest on June 15th, 2019. He is originally from Markham, Ontario, and is currently assigned to several community ministries for the Congregation of the Resurrection, including vocations, and our lay association: the Apostles of the Resurrection.

TWENTY SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
September 26, 2021

GATHERING TIME
(10-15 Minutes)

Introduction to the Word:

On November 29th 2014, Pope Francis opened the Year of Consecrated Life, to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council's decree on the adaptation and renewal of religious life, also known as *Perfectae Caritatis*, or "perfect charity." I was by then three months into my novitiate, the first stage of formation in religious life, where candidates – called "novices" – go away from familiar people, places, and things, to live basic religious life for one year. That is, to live as if under the vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience in community, and to learn about the spirituality and life of the community that they are discerning to enter.

It was very providential for me, then, that the official "focus" of many things in the Church throughout the world that year was the celebration of what I was starting: the religious vocation. And the one thing that has remained with me from all the various pronouncements during the Year of Consecrated life, was that religious life is about prophecy. The Holy Father wrote in his Apostolic Letter to all consecrated people that year: "the distinctive sign of consecrated life is prophecy."

Now some of you are probably wondering what that has to do with you, since few, if any, of our readers are members of a religious community. But a vocation to prophecy is not the exclusive domain of those called to religious or consecrated life. When we are baptized, we become members of the Body of Christ, and by that fact we all share in His threefold office of priest, prophet, and king. Certainly those called to religious or consecrated life live their prophetic vocation in a unique way, but all of the baptized are actually called by God to be prophets as well, to witness to the world with their words and their manner of living, the freshness of the Gospel wherever they happen to be.

Warm-up Activity *(about 8-10 minutes):*

Some questions to reflect on by yourself or with a group:

1. Have you ever realized that you are called from baptism to witness publicly to the Gospel?
2. Have you always done that? Was there a time when you were hesitant to do so?
3. Who are some people in your life who witnessed the freshness of the Gospel to you? How did they do that?

The Table of the Word

In its section on the vocation of lay people, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* clearly states that:

“...lay Christians are entrusted by God with the apostolate by virtue of their Baptism and Confirmation, they have the right and duty, individually or grouped in associations, to work so that the divine message of salvation may be known and accepted by all.” (CCC 900)

The associations in question are not merely mutual interest clubs – the Catechism goes on to state that they are *necessary*:

“...This duty is the more pressing when it is only through them that men can hear the Gospel and know Christ. Their activity in ecclesial communities is so necessary that, for the most part, the apostolate of the pastors cannot be fully effective without it.” (CCC 900)

It is a logical and natural thing for people with similar goals and values to form associations for greater reach and effectiveness. At times, this even led to the formation of religious communities, like the Congregation of the Resurrection. In a sense, our founder Bogdan Jański – himself a layman – was ahead of his time in recognizing that we could not be fully effective in our goal of renewing or resurrecting society without working side-by-side with the lay faithful. This has happened both in formal and informal ways throughout the brief history of our community, but a few years ago, the Apostles of the Resurrection was formed as a community of lay people who make an annually renewed commitment to “live out the mission and charism of the Congregation of the Resurrection in our lives in a deeper way, in the hope of bringing about the resurrection of society and entering into our own personal Resurrection.” (p.4, Handbook for the Associates of the Congregation of the Resurrection Ontario-Kentucky Province)

Penitential Rite:

Leader: “Would that all the Lord’s people were Prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit on them!”
Lord Jesus, you have called us to be your witnesses to the ends of the earth, **Lord, have mercy.**
Lord Jesus, the cry of the poor has reached your ears, **Christ, have mercy.**
Lord Jesus, you will judge those who cause little ones to stumble, **Lord, have mercy.**

Let us pray: (together)

O God, who manifests your almighty power
above all by pardoning and showing mercy,
bestow, we pray, your grace abundantly upon us
and make those hastening to attain your promises
heirs to the treasures of heaven.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION TIME (45 minutes)

*(As Christians we believe that the **WORD** of God we hear proclaimed each Sunday is an empowering Word, and that God is present in the Word proclaimed. This is the Word that God wants us to hear today. The dynamic of the Small Christian Community, namely, reflecting on our life story within the context of this Word, and sharing the insights of these reflections, is such that God's Spirit becomes present, and the gifts of the Spirit are experienced as empowering and life giving.)*

FIRST READING (Numbers 11.25-29)

A reading from the book of Numbers.

The Lord came down in the cloud, took some of the spirit that was on Moses and put it on the seventy elders. When the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But they did not do so again.

Two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad, and the other named Medad, and the spirit rested on them; they were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, and so they prophesied in the camp. A young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp."

Joshua, son of Nun, the assistant of Moses, one of his chosen men, said, "My lord Moses, stop them!" but Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were Prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit on them!"

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

SECOND READING (James 5.1-6)

A reading from the letter of Saint James.

Come now, you rich people, weep and wail for the miseries that are coming to you. Your riches have rotted, and your clothes are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have rusted, and their rust will be evidence against you, and it will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure for the last days. Listen! The wages of the labourers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. You have lived on the earth in luxury and in pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the righteous one, who does not resist you.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL (Mark 9.38-43, 45, 47-48)

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

After Jesus had finished teaching the disciples, John said to him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us."

But Jesus said, "Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able to soon afterward speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us is for us."

"For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward. If any of you put a stumbling block before these little ones who believe

in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea.

If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and go to hell, to the unquenchable fire.

And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell.

And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched.”

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

(Allow two minutes for quiet and for a brief reflection on a meaningful word or thought)

Lectio Divina means “sacred reading.” It was a popular form of prayer in the early Church. This Word proclaimed today is God's own Word, God's way of speaking to you today through God's own Spirit. So take a few moments to be quiet, allowing this Word you have just heard to touch you or soak into you as you reflect quietly on the three readings. Is there a word or thought that somehow attracts you or has your interest? If so, simply identify it and describe it in a few words.

COMMENTARY:

First Reading:

The background of our first reading was a complaint by the people of Israel. They complained about the manna, which God made to fall on the ground each evening and remained after the morning dew had evaporated. We are told that, when it was prepared, it tasted “like the taste of cakes baked with oil.” But some people began to complain about it, and reminisced how in Egypt they had more variety: meat, fish, “the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic.”

Moses in turn complains to God, saying that he is not able to bear the burden of being responsible for these people, and that he would rather die. So God tells Moses to gather seventy of the elders of the people, and to bring them to the tent of meeting, where the Ark of the Covenant was housed, the sign of God's presence among the people. God would then take some of the spirit that was on Moses and put it on them, “and they shall bear the burden of the people along with you so that you will not bear it all by yourself.”

And this is where our first reading picks up. We are told that when the spirit rested on them they prophesied. We are not told anything about the content of their prophesying, and then curiously, we are told “they did not do so again.” It seems, then, that the purpose of this temporary manifestation of prophesying was to be a clearly visible sign to the people that these seventy elders who would assist Moses in leading the people had been given some of the same spirit that had been given to Moses, whom the people regarded as a prophet. What is interesting here is that it is being a prophet – one who speaks for God – that gives legitimacy for leading the people. Later on in salvation history, the people of Israel will no longer be content with this unique criteria of leadership, but will want to be like other nations and have a king.

Second Reading:

In the fiery section of the letter of Saint James in our second reading, we have an example of the continuation of the role of prophecy in the early Church. James is addressing people who have obtained their wealth by injustice – fraudulently keeping back wages, “murdering the righteous,” possibly causing their death as a result of the wages that were withheld.

As obviously incompatible with following Christ as it sounds to us, murder does seem to have been a problem in the communities that Saint James was addressing. There are two other places where it is mentioned: “You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder” [James 4:2], and “...the one who said, “You shall not commit adultery,” also said, “You shall not murder.” Now if you do not commit adultery but if you murder, you have become a transgressor of the law” [James 2:11]. James’ inclusion of “murdering the righteous” is pointing out to those who grew wealthy by unjust means that they too are complicit in murder.

Saint James is exercising a prophetic role here, by providing God’s perspective, which is not immediately obvious to those who have grown wealthy through injustice. God hears the cries of the labourers who were unjustly defrauded of their wages, God sees that what those who have grown wealthy through injustice have done is tantamount to murder, and that God will visit miseries on them which will cause them to weep and wail.

Gospel:

We know from elsewhere in the New Testament that factions were a problem for the early Christians: “What I mean is that each of you says, ‘I belong to Paul, or ‘I belong to Apollos,’ or ‘I belong to Cephas,’ or ‘I belong to Christ.’ Has Christ been divided?” [1 Corinthians 1:12-13]. But we see it even in the Gospels, as in this Sunday’s passage, when the Apostle John reports to Jesus that they tried to stop someone who was casting out demons in Jesus’ name, because that person was not among the disciples to whom Jesus explicitly gave authority to cast out demons in His name.

Due to our acute grasp of our own limitations, we have a natural tendency to just hold on to what we think we have, and to assume things cannot be any other way. In this case, Saint John the Apostle was called by Jesus, had been following Jesus for some time, and was among the disciples whom Jesus sent out with authority to cast out unclean spirits. The root of factionalism is found in prioritizing certain ways of reaching an end goal over the end goal itself. It is a closing off of the mind from being open to other possibilities that are aiming for the same goal.

The other statements of Jesus in this Gospel passage also speak to being open rather than holding on. Generosity and openness shown to anyone in the name of Jesus will not lose its reward. Holding on, not being able to let go of—or, as Jesus tells us, even to throw away—the things that cause us to stumble, is what leads to the kinds of behaviours through which we are capable of willingly separating ourselves from God forever.

(Allow 5 – 10 minutes for the participants to react to the **Commentary** to identify a newly discovered insight.)

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION:

1. Do you ever fall into the tendency of factionalism (though it be well intended) as we saw in our first reading and Gospel? Why do you think that is?
2. What are some situations in today’s society where God’s perspective needs to be made known? What do you think God is saying to those situations?
3. What was one time when you were generous to someone in the name of Jesus?

CARING-PRAYING TIME: (15-20 minutes)

1. **Word of the Week:** "...Would that all the Lord's people were Prophets!"
2. **Suggestion for the Week:** Identify at least one area of your life where you might be called to exercise your baptismal vocation to be a witness of the Gospel.
3. **Intercessions:** (Response: **Lord, hear our prayer**)
Now we turn to the Lord with our prayers and petitions.

For Pope Francis and the Church throughout the world, that we may be inspired to live out our prophetic vocation, we pray the Lord...

For all those who are struggling: physically, mentally, and/or financially during this pandemic and all who seek to help them, we pray to the Lord...

For government leaders, that they will work to protect the poor from exploitation, we pray to the Lord.

For vocations to the consecrated life, we pray to the Lord...

For those who have died, especially those who have died alone, that they may enter into the fullness of God's kingdom, and those who mourn for them may be comforted, we pray to the Lord...

How can we help you in prayer this week?

Let us pray (together)

May this heavenly mystery, O Lord,
restore us in mind and body,
that we may be co-heirs in glory with Christ,
to whose suffering we are united
whenever we proclaim his Death.
Who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

**With hands and hearts united in gratitude for God's favours today, we pray that all those in our influence be moved to be open to your Word and your Spirit, while we pray as one,
OUR FATHER ...**

Celebrating the Word, Resurrection Ministries of the Congregation of the Resurrection Ontario-Kentucky Province (including the former Resurrection Centre), 265 Westmount Road North, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada N2L 3G7. (Celebrating the Word was founded by Father Frank Ruetz, C.R. deceased 2012). For information: **website:** www.resurrectionists.ca. **Email:** provincialoffice@resurrectioncollege.ca
The Scripture version used in this commentary is the New Revised Standard Version (copyrighted by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA).