

A Prophet Enters the Stage

When was the last time you did a prophetic deed? You may think that it is a rather strange question to ask, because such deeds are not ones which we ordinarily associate with ourselves. We have an image of what a prophet is and what a prophet does, and somehow we don't seem to match up. But pause for a moment and reflect. Who in today's world would you say was carrying out prophetic acts? For instance you might well say that Pope Francis with his call for a new evangelisation is indeed making a prophetic call to the world, to open its eyes and ears to the message of Christ, but maybe we should look closer to home. Maybe we should see in the simple acts of Christian love, in which we all partake, a real prophetic sign to those around us; a sign that our faith still resonates so as to make a real difference in peoples' lives.

John the Baptist was a "big" man in every sense of the word. He had stature, he had a voice, he had a dramatic appearance, and he placed himself within a very dramatic setting. But most of all, he had a very big and dramatic message. To deliver his message he placed himself within the context and the environment of *wilderness*. In doing so, he evoked the great theme of the Exodus which was so strong and powerful for the people of Israel, such that the message he then proclaimed had a mighty resonance. The desert or wilderness was the pathway through which the Israelites had journeyed on their way to freedom. In the wilderness was the heart of the people. It was the place where they experienced the covenant that God had made with them and it was the setting for making them aware of the need to revisit their beginnings in order to experience the kingdom which was about to flower and blossom and come into fruit. The genius of John was that he knew and sensed that this 'moment' had arrived and that was his prophetic witness. The question for us is whether we get any sense of 'moment' about our own time. Are we aware of the shifting sands on which we are walking? Do we experience any desire in people for the gospel, or have we ourselves become somewhat lacklustre? Do we need shacking up a bit?

The centre of our religious life, the very heart and soul of our understanding of God, is in and through Jesus, and coming to appreciate this is of itself a prophetic act. It is symbolised in the sacramental signs through which our lives journey. In our baptism, we are called to walk through the waters of the Red Sea, passing through the wilderness and out into the freedom of the new life in Christ. In the Eucharist we are fed and sustained so as to bear fruit in the world, to live lives formed in a bond of matrimonial love so as to make present the kingdom for which John so longed and Jesus inaugurated. Our very lives express the gospel which we hold so dear. We just need to put it "out there" and to be courageous enough to hold it up for others to see that this is the witness to which our God calls us.

So it's not too difficult after all to see a prophet at work, we just need a bit of retuning. Yes, I'm sure it is the case that what Pope Francis is doing will rightly be spoken of as *prophetic*, but prophetic words require prophetic deeds, and prophetic deeds need prophetic people to put them into practice. The stage is set, all that's needed are the players – it's over to us then.