

HOM 4th Sunday 2024 Jan 28

Online Biblical websites put the number of Old Testament prophecies about Jesus somewhere between 200 and 450 – depending on how explicit the prophecy is and how clear its fulfillment is. The earliest of these Messianic prophecies i.e., prophecies about a promised Messiah or Anointed One, were not those of the prophet Ezekiel in the 6th century BC, nor those of the prophet Jeremiah in the 7th century BC, nor even those well-known Messianic prophecies of the prophet Isaiah, some of them written as early as the 8th century BC.

Rather, the earliest prophecies about Jesus are found in the Book of Genesis and the Book of Deuteronomy, both written by Moses in the 13th century BC. Today's first reading has the very important and explicit Mosaic prophecy about Jesus that's found in the Book of Deuteronomy. It was given by Moses in one of his last addresses to the Israelites before he died. He told them that: *"A prophet like me will the Lord, your God, raise up for you from among your own kin; to him you shall listen."*

Moses then recounted for them that this is what they requested early in their desert journey when God gave Moses the commandments on Mt. Sinai amid the manifestation of Himself with thunder, lightning, smoke and trumpet blast. The people were afraid and trembling because of this and said to Moses: *"You speak to us, and we will listen; but let God not speak to us, or we shall die."* (Ex. 20: 19)

Moses then repeated what the Lord told him: *"I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their kin, and I will put my words into His mouth; He shall tell them all that I command Him. Whoever will not listen to my words which He speaks in my name, I myself will make him answer for it."*

These prophetic words of Moses about Jesus were taken to heart by the Israelites who remained mindful of them generation after generation for more than a millennium right down to the time of Jesus. We can see this in what Philip said to Nathaniel, both called to be apostles, when Jesus told Philip to follow Him, and Philip then sought out Nathaniel. *"We have found the one about whom Moses wrote in the law,"* Philip said to Nathaniel, *"and also the prophets, Jesus, Son of Joseph, from Nazareth."* (Jn 1: 43-45).

So, Jesus was being recognized here as the one to Whom Moses was prophetically pointing when he said: *"A prophet like me will the Lord, your God, raise up for you from among your own kin. To him you shall listen."* Implicit in this is that Jesus, Son of Joseph, a kinsman from the line of David, will have the authority not only of Moses, but of God Himself who spoke through Moses.

In fact, Jesus, the Promised One is God in the flesh, who now speaks directly to the people. In our Gospel reading He speaks to the people in the synagogue at Capernaum, teaching them, like no others, on His own authority, and not like not like the experts on the Mosaic Law – the scribes – who in their teaching always quoted earlier rabbi's going back to Moses. The people picked up on this immediately. *"All were amazed. What is this? A new teaching with authority"*, they exclaimed to one another.

Not only that, but while Jesus was teaching, a member of the congregation who was possessed by an unclean spirit cried out: *"What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? 'Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are – the Holy One of God!'"* That Jesus speaks on His own authority as God -- and indeed IS GOD -- is made plain when He rebukes and expels the demon holding the man hostage: *"Quiet! Come out of him!"* And the unclean spirit immediately leaves the man with a loud cry.

Jesus, as you know, also quelled the wind and stormy sea simply with His command: *"Be still."* He healed leprosy and cured other afflictions with the words, *"Be healed!"* He remitted sin as only God can telling the paralyzed man: *"Your sins are forgiven."* Jesus also says of the bread: THIS IS MY BODY. And of the wine: THIS IS MY BLOOD. And, these are made so.

And if all these are subject to Jesus' words. And Jesus Himself is freely and out of love subject to the Father. So, we, too, must freely and out of love subject ourselves to the Father's will with Jesus for our true good and the true good of others who depend on us. We must do so freely and help others to do so freely because the Lord will not force His beloved people to heed His words and example and to share His blessedness forever, indeed in His divinity and divine glory.

Here are some more words of Jesus that are critically important but often disregarded:

"The road is broad that leads to destruction and those who enter through it are many. How narrow the gate and constricted the road that leads to life. And those who find it are few." (Matt 7: 13-14)

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the Kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven." (Matt. 7: 21)...like Jesus, I would add, Who said: *"I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him who sent me."* (John 6: 38)

"The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure buried in a field, Jesus taught, which a person finds...and sells all that he has and buys that field." (Matt 13: 44) That person goes ALL IN. "I am all yours O most loving Jesus..." Yes, all yours. Let it be done to me whatever is pleasing to you...pleasing to the Father ...for my good and the good of your people, especially those I hold dear.

"Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me," the Lord tells us (Mark 8: 34)... *"Whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this faithless and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of when He comes in His Father's glory with the holy angels."* (Mark 8: 35)

"I am the vine, you are the branches", Jesus explains... *"anyone who does not remain in me will be thrown out and wither; people will gather them and throw them into a fire and they will be burned."* (John 15: 5-6) But how do we remain in you, Lord? Jesus answers: *"He who loves me keeps my word and the Father and I will come to him and dwell with him ."* (John 14-23-26) And, *"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him."* (John 6: 56)

Indeed, Jesus says solemnly: *"Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you do not have life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life..."* (John 6: 53-54)

And if we do this – if we are united and conformed to Him Who is the Way, the Truth and the Life – then we will fulfill the New Commandment of Love He gave us: *"This is my commandment",* Jesus said, *"love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."* (John 15: 12-13)

So, with all His words and actions Jesus is calling us to something that is not worldly, something quite exceptional. He is calling us to lay down our lives with Him so that those we hold dear and everybody we know will somehow get to heaven. This is to become our worship at Mass that is lived out in between.

References to this are found in the Mass prayers themselves, in every Eucharistic Prayer, some more specific than others. They are also found in the other prayers in the Mass, frequently in the *Prayer Over the Offerings* right before the Preface for Eucharistic Prayer.

Yesterday (Saturday) morning, in the Mass for the Blessed Virgin Mary, Image and Mother of the Church, the *Prayer Over the Offerings* stated it this way:

LORD, TRANSFORM THESE GIFTS, WHICH WE BRING TO YOU WITH JOYFUL HEARTS INTO THE SACRAMENT OF OUR SALVATION (I.E., EUCHARIST) ON THIS MEMORIAL OF THE VIRGIN MARY IN GLORY FOR SHE IS THE SHINING MODEL OF TRUE WORSHIP FOR YOUR CHURCH AND OF OUR DUTY TO OFFER OURSELVES TO YOU AS A HOLY VICTIM, PLEASING IN YOUR EYES. THROUGH CHRIST OUR LORD.

Jesus told us to do this so that His joy may be in us and that our joy may be complete. (John 15: 11) That may seem absurd, but His words are to be trusted because they are God's words; they are the words of everlasting life.

On Friday, I had the privilege of making a pastoral visit to a group home for brain-injured men near Harmar. The three Catholics there gathered with me in one of their rooms and I did a Scripture reading, gave them Holy Communion, and then just sat and talked with them for about five minutes. We talked about sports and about their activities which included going out to dinner at a restaurant once a week and occasionally to a Pirates game etc. But they all expressed a special love for going to Mass each week. The staff takes them by van to a local Catholic church. This, and receiving Holy Communion when I visit them each month, was what they seemed to appreciate the most.

These are regular guys who take jabs at each other, the other residents, and the staff. And their joy was something you would just have to see for yourself. One of the men is a middle-aged. His head injury was the result of falling 30 ft. onto a concrete floor from an overhead crane he was repairing then the power was turned on unexpected. Another man, also middle-aged and in a wheel chair, fell backward on ice at the used car lot where he worked part-time to supplement his income as the music teacher and band director at a Catholic High School in Cleveland. That's where his home is and his wife lives. They talk on the phone each day and exchange visits every so often. He has this million dollar smile and is amazingly upbeat, and one time I asked him about this. He said something like it is a choice on his part to help uplift those around him, and that he was like this before and after his head injury.

The other fellow is younger and I do not know the history of his disabling injury, only that he told me he had a sound Catholic upbringing. What all three had in common besides their cerebral trauma, and their joyfulness, was their faith. It seems to me that they are all very close to Christ, crucified and Risen.

We can be close to Christ crucified and Risen. We can have consummate oneness with Him now and forever and help others to have this. I invite you to join me at Holy Communion in praying these words silently and sincerely: I AM ALL YOURS O MOST LOVING JESUS, THROUGH MARY YOUR MOTHER, WITH THE HELP OF ST. JOSEPH.