

14th Sunday, Ord. Time (B)
St. Athanasius and St. Francis Parishes
July 4, 5, 2015

(Read the following quotes, without indicating to whom they belong)

“That's the problem with our country. Everybody folds under pressure. Instead of doing the right thing, they have two people go outside with a sign. People see this and say, “O gee, we have to do this”. Pressure, pressure. People can't handle pressure.”

.....Donald Trump

“As governor, I've never wavered from telling you the truth as I see it, and then acting to make sure that you know that is the truth as I believe it in my heart.”

“You are going to get what I think whether you like it or not, whether or not it makes you cringe.”
“I promise I do not worry about what is popular but what is right.”

.....Governor Chris Christie

“The church wants pastors who are unafraid of persecution, are angels of hope and charity, and are convincing witnesses with a life rooted in prayer and the Gospel.

It's quite simple, because the most effective and authentic witness is one that does not contradict, by behavior and lifestyle, what one preaches and teaches.”

.....Pope Francis to newly ordained archbishops,
June 29, Feast of Saints Peter and Paul.

So, who do you think these quotes belong to (they are all from this past week.)

Interesting folks ... strange bed-fellows. But people who seem to in some way echo the message of today's Scriptures, namely, 'strength in one's convictions'. And we get to hear from another threesome of people: Ezechiel, Paul, and Jesus. Each of them run into obstacles as they listened to God and then lived and preached as they heard God calling them to do.

Ezechiel: Ezechiel is sent to the Israelites during a time when they were rebelling against God. Today's First Scripture cites them as being '*hard of face and obstinate of heart*'. He is told that whether or not "*they heed or resist his message, they will know at least that a prophet has been among them.*"

Paul: In preaching to those in his Corinthian Church, a tough and challenging group of believers, Paul explains to them how he has suffered many setbacks and even carries with him some kind of disability. Nonetheless, he assures them that in these very weaknesses, he is strong. God said to him, "*My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.*"

Jesus: He was badly received by his jealous neighbors and fellow citizens of Nazareth. He was maybe even overwhelmed and beaten down emotionally by the way they refused to accept him back and hear him out. Jesus says,

“A prophet is not without honor except in his native place and among his own kin and in his own house.” The gospel says that there was so little openness to him, so little faith, (maybe so little 'cooperating consciousness') that he could do hardly any miracles among them.

So we ask how this relates to ourselves. While we are not professional prophets in any sense of the word, what you and I say and how you and I live can be 'prophetic'. Maybe a better word is 'witness'. What you and I say and you and I live gives witness witness either to Jesus and His way, or witness to the ways of the world.

In another gospel, Matthew's, we hear Jesus say, “You cannot serve both God and money, ...you cannot serve both God and the world.” It is not possible to be neutral. We are either 'in with Jesus' or 'in with the world'. Thus we need to examine the strength of our own convictions about God and the things of God. Using Donald Trump's words, “Everybody folds under pressure”. Or Chris Christie, “I promise I do not worry about what is popular, but what is right”. Or Pope Francis, “The church wants people who are unafraid of persecution, are angels of hope and charity, and are convincing witnesses with a life rooted in prayer and the Gospel”.

Where do we begin.

We need to be strong in our convictions, and also able to express our convictions.
Do I know what I believe well enough to be able to tell someone else what I believe? Do I have the vocabulary to do this?

From time to time we might hang around with those who have different convictions from our own. This will broaden our own experience, test our own convictions, and give us a chance to talk about our convictions.

We also need to express our beliefs in an open, understanding, and respectful manner. St. Paul says, *“I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and constraints, for the sake of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong.”* There is already enough shouting going on in the world.

And then again to Pope Francis, “the Church needs convincing witnesses with a life rooted in prayer and the gospel.”

To close, scholars say that there are only two situations in the gospels in which Jesus is reported as amazed. One of those is in today's gospel, when Jesus is amazed by the lack of faith in the people in his home town. The other is when Jesus is amazed by the strength of the faith of the Roman soldier who comes and asks Jesus to cure his son and says that Jesus doesn't even need to go to the soldier's house. Just say the word, he tells Jesus. I want to amaze Jesus by my faith, not by my resistance to his call. I hope that will be your choice as well.