

When it comes to prophets, you either love them or hate them. There is no lukewarm or neutral response to their incisive message. When a prophet's words challenge unjust systems and liberate folks who have been oppressed, those set free sing the praises of the prophet. But those whose power, privilege, and status are threatened by the prophet's words and actions will do all they can to silence and even eliminate them. To pray for a prophet like Moses is not only to ask for a prominent prophetic leader but also for each one in the community to be transformed by the prophetic spirit.

In the first reading, the Israelites have prayed for a prophet like Moses, and God promises to raise up another such leader. They want one from among their midst who is deeply prayerful and close to God, who will know and convey God's desires, and who can lead the people out of their enslavements and their desert desolation. Moses assures them their prayer is heard. As Israel's history continues, there are many prophets who arise. They are, however, not confined to those whose words and deeds are recorded in the Scriptures.

In our own day, it is easy to identify as prophets (people who by their examples, have shown us the way we fight against injustice, fight for human rights, human dignity...). Because the stories of how their lives have been cut short for their prophetic witness have come to public attention. There are also everyday prophets, and communities of unsung heroes, who do difficult and agitating work for justice, who never come into the spotlight. They are those who know that trouble is sure to come alongside any triumph of justice. The trouble can even come from within one's own community of faith, not only from outside opponents.

In the gospel, we see Jesus acclaimed as a prophet, whose fame spreads far and wide. He appears as the promised "prophet like Moses," who teaches with authority, and who has power to cast out unclean spirits. While at first people respond with amazement and wonder, they will quickly turn on him as the gospel progresses, as his challenging message upsets the status quo. To ask for such a prophet is not only to ask for a leader who will confront unjust forces external to the faith community but also that we ourselves be confronted by the prophet's searing ability to speak truth. It is to expose ourselves to the invitation to be purified and transformed, to have any "demons" within us be tamed and cast out.

There are forces and demons in our life, forces of evil outside of us and forces of evil inside of us that can control our life. Sometimes we think that if we just have the right ideas, read a little bit more and get more information then we can somehow think ourselves into spiritual freedom, when what we really need is the power and grace of God.

There are demons that can take control of our life such as hate, prejudice, greed, gluttony, and lust. These are all powers that would destroy our life and rob us of the freedom, dignity and purpose God has for us. And within them all lurks, of course, the evil one. They can be like a storm out of control. We seem to be at their mercy. Then, comes that moment when the sun starts to shine. The storm is over and the snow that had paralyzed us, held everything, begins to melt.

That is like the power of Jesus Christ in our life. Just as the snow gives way to the strength of the sun, so the powers that seem to dominate our life can recede before the power of the Risen Christ. Jesus can do for us what He did for the man in the Gospel. Jesus spoke with an authority beyond books and learning. He spoke with the authority of God and that unclean spirit left the man.

Today, people want freedom from the powers that dominate their life. So often, they turn to superstition, psychics, chain, things that we may have thought were from the past but are still very much with us.

As Christians we need to avoid superstitions. Jesus liberated the man possessed just as He came to free us from all the forces of evil, the ones outside us and the ones inside us as well, so that we can live in the dignity and freedom of the people of God. We need to avoid anything that diminishes, dilutes, divides, weakens and fragments the most precious gift we have our faith, our trust in Jesus Christ. Whatever the forces we fight against, we know that One stronger than they is among us.

Whatever the demons in our life, demons from the past, demons in the present, what Jesus did for that man in the synagogue He can do for us. Let us recognize among us the One Who has the power to cast out our demons, Who seeks to enter our hearts and lives, Who wants to make us faithful and whole.