

Ow father (Anthol. Russ 14)
Be Thoughtful
(DEC. 1397)
Kyrie: Hoday Nam
DEC-C
2599

[ANGELUS]

Charlie Brown, in the Peanuts cartoon, once said he'd like to be a prophet. He was put down, of course, by Lucy who said he could only be a false prophet. But perhaps, Charlie missed, I could be a good false prophet.

→ Well, I suppose there've always been more false prophets around than real ones, the point being that the real ones aren't appreciated (to say the least), and the false ones are anyway more popular just because their message, interesting, exciting, optimistic, gloomy or whatever, doesn't challenge our comfortableness. As Jesus Himself pointed out, no prophet is ever accepted in his own country. And He went on to point out how it was foreigners, outsiders, for whom the great OT prophets Elijah and Elisha worked their miracles of feeding the hungry and healing the diseased, in the person of a Sidonian widow and a Syrian leper. For among their own people there wasn't the same faith and trust in the power from God, which those two great men had. Jesus' own townspeople, too, were so real at His telling them some home truths that they tried to throw Him over a cliff. These days, we do use some pretty drastic ways too, to stop ourselves and others from hearing too much home truth: governments, in particular, have lots of nasty ways of stopping or trying to stop their people hearing what may be 'inconvenient' news or views. From Marx to ayatollahs, there've certainly been enough prophets of one kind and another around in our modern world. But before consigning them to some convenient cliff, hadn't we better have a little more reflective thought about prophecy [— a topic that maybe yesterday's scripture readings at Sunday Mass has already suggested to you.] Specifically, the prophetic function of those Christians blessed

with the gift of prophecy, and of the teaching church. This last, perhaps, more in new yearly, with all the talk about theologians in trouble with authority, & about authority topical now with the recent fuss about two prominent European Catholic theologians. itself = the church.

It is something for prayer, too, of all of us for each other, for the special gifts of wisdom, understanding and counsel that come from God. | One of the marks of authentic prophecy is that the true prophets concentrate on the present. Their heavens may be mesmerised by images of the future, but the prophets were driven by God to talk about what was going on right now. Too easily we create a future on our own, worshipping imagination instead of God. And so we justify ugly gulags, mad holy wars, inquisitions and crusades, on the grounds that these are required by the future we envisage. Wherever the hoped-for future is oppressing living people, that is a system that must be changed because of its sinfulness. It is highly instructive that the future predicted by the Biblical prophets turned out to be a time when precisely those present evils they condemned would have been corrected. Their connection of ethical action with belief in God was why the OT prophets were rejected by their listeners: and this too is a mark of the true prophet. Almost all of them taught that the poor, the dispossessed, the voiceless are the 'remnant' to whom God will be loyal: and Jesus put Himself in that tradition when He said that He was sent to bring glad tidings to the poor. To think, as some do, that the church has only now discovered the dispossessed is a sad misreading of history. The church may indeed have become distracted for a while, but its tradition is clear — as its message has now again become. Think about it awhile, while we pray in song this prayer from the Russian Orthodox liturgy: "God is with us"

Anthol. Russ 2'
Liturg. Chants
RUS. 24

MUSIC - PRAYERS

Another note of the true prophet was that he did not speak vaguely, as neither did Jesus. They did not talk to mystify. Jesus constantly pointed out social, economic and civil patterns of behavior that contradicted the Covenant of Israel with God, and Israel's election — and that's why people were troubled by Him. Samuel was out to get Saul off the throne of Israel; Jeremiah during Israel's final revolt against Babylon urged the garrison to surrender and was tortured and jailed for his pains.

But there's a further note also: the prophets regularly claimed they could address only those issues God taught them to address; and Jesus notably, did not take issue with some social realities his contemporaries thought important and grave, Roman taxation for instance. This is one aspect of authentic prophecy which people today find most difficult to accept. The teacher church has look heavens because it has kept off some issues. But it is all the same clear that the church has also rediscovered its gift of prophecy.

This is the only way to understand the modern papal letters, from Leo XIII's on workers and labour, to the present pope's Redeemer of Mankind ^{90th anniversary letter of that occasion, on the same day} issued ^{the year} ~~last~~ ^{George} ~~year~~ ^{and subsequent reissues}.

The church's concern with faith and justice today is, really, an age-old concern with a new name, operating in very new realities. We must cry out against those evils that God teaches us, church and individuals, to denounce: present evils, and concrete cases. How are the nations to know that the good news we carry is true? When Jesus was asked that question, He told His critics to look at what He did.