

Today we hear from the prophet Amos, whose ministry occurred about 750 years before the birth of Jesus. God sent him to speak to a challenging message to the kings of his time, who were perpetrating injustices against their people and against God.

To be clear, prophets were not merely future-tellers, they were foremost, truth-tellers. The Bible makes clear that there were also false prophets: “*Thus says the LORD of hosts: Do not listen to the words of your prophets, who fill you with emptiness; They speak visions from their own fancy, not from the mouth of the LORD*” (Jer 23:16).

Here’s the distinction: just as has been true in probably every age, false prophets were typically well-received, while true prophets were rejected and often martyred. Being a prophet of the Lord, truth-teller, meant having to deal with the pushback and the ire of those to whom the message was given.¹

There’s an interesting tension with most all of the biblical prophets. It might sound odd, but a profit held higher authority than kings, because they answered directly to God, unlike a king whose power and authority were of an earthly nature. Because of this, the kings were generally uneasy with God’s prophets.²

When we think of these two sources of authority between prophet and king—one source being God and the other being secular—it calls to mind the tension between politics and religion. These realms are not inherently in conflict. The only occasion Jesus even mentioned Caesar, was the command to give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, including the dirty coins that served as taxes.³ But Jesus also commanded us to give to God what belongs to God, which ultimately is the entirety of ourselves.

Today we live in a nation that has a fundamental right to religious freedom, meaning the state cannot establish or disallow any religion. This is what it means to have separation of church and state. Many people, as you know, understand this separation to merely mean that the Church has no voice in the public or political sphere. To be sure, the Church only has an interest in politics when matters of politics encroach upon things we hold as sacred.⁴

Let’s be honest: many self-identifying Christians, make politics their religion. Some are left-leaning and others, right-leaning. For some, their political ‘Caesar’, is their voice of authority, so much, that they cease to be sufficiently guided by the same higher authority that spoke to the prophets of old. They fail to genuinely ask and understand, “*What does my Lord have to say to me about this?*”⁵

I think of some of the protests we see or read about in the news, such as a group who invade a meeting of those they oppose for the purpose of yelling and creating disruption, or the people who block the freeway in support of a cause, or the man who vandalizes property to attract attention to a cause. While I’ll withhold judgment about whether that’s true prophetic witness, I wonder if they’re asking, “*What does my Lord have to say to me about this? Or am I acting impulsively or being pulled into this by a howling mob?*” We must seek to hear that voice to guide us.

It’s worth noting that Amos was not a religious authority of his time. He was an agricultural worker, a regular guy. And each of us regular folks are also called to a prophetic office. We were baptized “*priest, prophet and king*”. At baptism, God wired us to be a voice for his truths, truths to be proclaimed according to the timing and manner he would ask. In other words, not impulsively and not with a hammer.

¹ Kreeft, Peter. *Food for the Soul: Reflections on the Mass Readings (Cycle B)* (Food for the Soul Series Book 2). Word on Fire. Kindle Edition.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

But how do we know we're speaking God's words and not just our own? It requires humility, but also dialogue with our Lord that is both patient and persistent. Also, while the Church is not perfect, because it includes sinful people, the Church and her teachings should be a primary place, helping to guide us in being a prophetic witness to God's truths.

He called us to be prophetic, not to be indifferent and not to be frozen in fear. Proclaiming God's truths will come with some discomfort and push back. This prophetic office was not given to us to deliver insults, to deceive, or merely to complain to one another. Instead, it was given to us that we might declare the truths of God's love; and that he desires the world around us to be a truer reflection of his love; and finally, that by our prophetic witness, we may point the way to his Kingdom.