

20th Sunday per Annum
Jeremiah 38:4-6, 8-10;
Hebrews 12:1-4;
Luke 12:49-53
Little Flower - 8/18/13

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today's first reading comes from the prophet Jeremiah, one of the major prophets of the Old Testament. Because Jeremiah was making the leaders of the Israelites uncomfortable, because he was not preaching what they wanted to hear, because he was challenging their faith, their values, and their actions, the princes persuaded the king to kill him. However, we know from today's reading that the king was later persuaded to change his mind. For the most part, biblical prophets were not popular people because they did not preach a popular message. Even Jesus himself said, "*A prophet is not without honor except in his native place and in his own house*" [Mt. 13:57].

I think Pope Francis is a modern prophet in the Church and the world. Therefore, I would like to share you some of his vision for the Church based on two of his talks and his actions.¹ Also, I think it is appropriate to reflect on his prophetic message in light of the *Connected in the Spirit* strategic planning process in which we as an Archdiocese and, more specifically, the Indianapolis Deaneries are engaged.

According to Pope Francis, the God who revealed himself in history is "the 'God who is near' to his people, a nearness which culminates in the incarnation. He is the God who goes forth to meet his people." Therefore, the Church is called to be a missionary church. Missionary discipleship is both call and invitation and therefore we are all called in our own way to be missionaries.

One of the consequences of this is that the Church must live in the present. The Pope reminds us, "God is real and he shows himself in the 'today'.... The 'today' is closest to eternity; even more: the 'today' is a flash of eternity. In the 'today', eternal life is in play." He goes on to say that it is spiritually unhealthy to be focused on the Church as it was in the past or what the Church might be in the future.

Second, the Church must live on the peripheries, i.e., at the outer boundaries. The Church, and we are the Church, is called to proclaim by word and deed the Good News of Jesus Christ to those who live at or on the margins because of sin, pain, injustice, or ignorance. In other words, the Church has to look outward rather than inward. He criticizes, to use his words, the "self-referent" Church that "keeps Jesus Christ within herself and does not allow Him to go out"

My brothers and sisters, Pope Francis has been prophetic not only in his words but also in his actions, specifically his lifestyle. In fact, it is because of his actions that so many people are interested in him and what he says. People from all over the world have been drawn to him because of his humility and simplicity. For example, people were surprised that he went to the hotel where he had stayed before the conclave and paid his own bill. Likewise, he has chosen not to live in the Vatican Palace but in a small apartment in the Vatican guest house where he celebrates Mass each morning for the guests and eats with the guests in the dining room. I think the Holy Father's most valuable practical lesson for us is to challenge us to live more humble, more simple lives. As I mentioned a couple of weeks ago, he lives a very simple lifestyle, and yet he radiates warmth, joy, peace, and happiness. He witnesses the power of Christ crucified and risen.

¹Address to the Leadership of the Episcopal Conferences of Latin America during the General Coordination Meeting, Sumaré Study Center, Rio de Janeiro, Sunday, 28 July 2013, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco_20130728_gmg-celam-rio_en.html and "Havana Prelate Shares Notes From Cardinal Bergoglio's Pre-Conclave Speech : Argentine Archbishop Warned Against a 'Worldly Church,'" Havana, Cuba, March 26, 2013, <http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/havana-prelate-shares-notes-from-cardinal-bergoglio-s-pre-conclave-speech>