

Moses speaks of a prophet that God will raise up. What is a prophet? A prophet is someone that God has raised up to speak His word, speak the truth of God. In the Old Testament, God raised up prophets time and time again to remind people of what God was asking of them, and many times to point out how the people were failing to be faithful to the Lord. Sometimes being a prophet got them killed because the people didn't want to hear it, like with the prophet Jeremiah. The Church then pairs this 1st reading with this Gospel reading to show that ultimately Jesus is the prophet Moses was speaking of.

Jesus spoke the fullness of God's Word, God's truth. In fact, He is God's word Himself, and the people who heard Him recognized this. We heard the Gospel say, "The people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority."

By our baptism, we are all called to be prophets with Jesus. We are all called to be proclaimers of God's word in our lives in the ways in which we are able to do that. For most of you, that means being prophets to your families and in your work places. Not beating people over the head with the truth of God, but always offering God's truth, sharing the truth of the Gospel, never being afraid to proclaim the truth. Many times this is not easy. It means receiving ridicule or even scorn. But the reward is the peace of heart that comes from doing what's right, from doing what God asks of us.

In the First Reading, Moses goes on to make the distinction between true prophets and false prophets. For us to be true prophets it must always be God's word that we speak which is found fully in Church teaching. If we start proclaiming something that goes against Church teaching, then we have truly become a false prophet.

Priests and bishops share in Jesus' prophetic ministry in a unique and singular way, and they proclaim God's word in the name of the Church. This past week bishops from all over the country began to exercise this prophetic ministry in a most public way. Maybe you've heard in the news, the Obama administration has ruled that in order to comply with the so-called "Obamacare" health care law, all institutions must offer coverage for contraception, sterilization, and abortion. There are only very narrow religious exceptions given to this: parishes will be exempted, but not Catholic schools, or Catholic hospitals, or things like Catholic Charities. The University of Notre Dame will not be exempted nor will Saint Francis University. All Catholic entities will be forced to buy insurance coverage for their employees for contraception, sterilization, and abortion.

Bishops from all over the country have spoken out ferociously against this. Leading the charge is Archbishop Timothy Dolan of New York, stating this is the most egregious violation of religious freedom in the history of the United States. Let's be clear: this is the government now under the direction of President Obama telling us that we must violate our religious beliefs in this most grave way.

On Thursday in South Bend, Bishop Rhoades gave a press conference during which he said that no matter what the consequences, we will not comply. We will not comply with this unjust law. In fact, we cannot comply because complying would mean turning our backs on Jesus and His teaching and we will not do that.

This could get ugly. Dioceses could receive hefty fines. Could it be that Bishops could risk going to jail? Hard to believe that this could be a possibility in our country, but that's where we are, and this is what it means to be a prophet, what it means to follow Jesus Christ, to proclaim God's truth no matter what the personal consequences.

May God give our Bishops the grace and strength they need to be steadfast prophets and may God give all of us the grace and strength that we need to proclaim God's truth no matter what the personal cost.

Given by Father Mark Gurtner at Our Lady of Good Hope Catholic Church, Fort Wayne, Indiana, on the Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time, 2012.