

November 17, 2013 – 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year C
Jesus in 3-D

I am so excited!

I have so much to tell you.

It looks like today's homily is going to take about 3 hours.

Isn't that just fantastic?

I have been bombarded with ideas – from a class about the prophets, from life, from the scripture readings from the season.

OK, I'll contain myself.

I'll contain my excitement.

Only one hour for the homily?

Oh, just ¼ hour?

Let me start with the prophets.

We read about the prophets in the Bible.

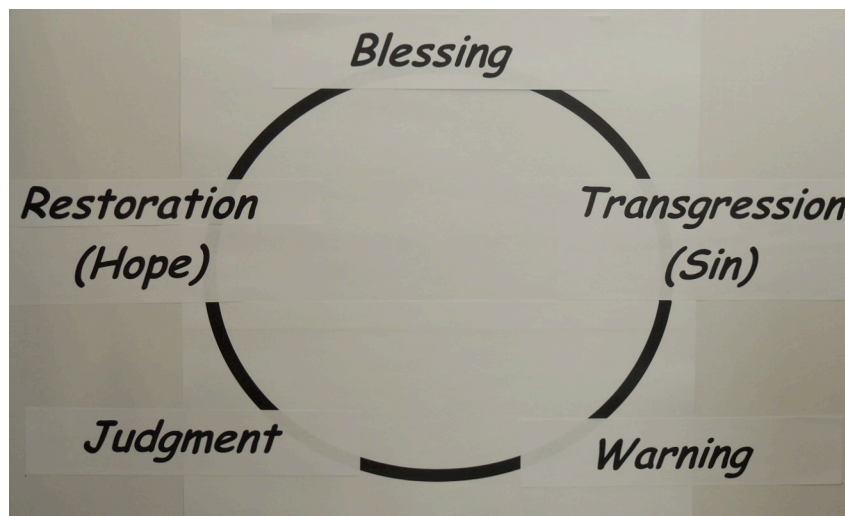
We have notable ones like Moses, Samuel and Elijah.

We have ones who even have Bible books named after them: Isaiah, Jeremiah, and all the way down to Malachi.

All these prophets in different times, different places and different situations spoke about what people should do to love God and love their neighbor.

As the scholars look at the prophetic works in the Old Testament some patterns appear.

One simple pattern seen so often is this cycle:



- It starts in a fine state where everything is going smoothly – a blessed state
- Then problems start – rebellion, transgressions, sins, sins against God and sins against the neighbors
- God alerts and warns the people of the problems – God speaks to the people through the prophets. If the people listen to the warnings and correct their behavior things go well again.
- If the warnings are not heeded and things get even worse we come to a phase call “judgment”
 - o it’s a little like a court where the judge passes judgment and proscribes a punishment
 - o it’s a lot like a family where the parents try to guide the children on the best and correct path – there are consequences for our actions
- The last part of the cycle is restoration, promises of better things in the future, a sense of hope to go on.

As we might guess from the number of prophets that God sends to the people of the Old Testament, this cycle, this pattern is repeated ... and repeated ... often.

Let’s look at today’s reading from the prophet Malachi and see what stages are noted there.

**“...the proud and all evildoers will be stubble,
and the day that is coming will set them on fire...”**

Sure sounds like things had gotten quite bad because God is making a judgment and describing the punishment.

Then it immediately goes on to the next stage of promises and hope.

**“But for you who fear my name,
there will arise the sun of justice with its healing rays.”**

Today’s Psalm continues in that positive stage by promising us that:

“The Lord comes to rule the earth with justice.”

Where the Lord rules there is no jury tampering, there is no bribing the judge, there’s no hiding of the evidence, there are no excuses, and there’s no hiding behind the “letter of the law”.

The letter to the Thessalonians shows us another dimension of prophecies, the dimension of time in the prophecies.

When the prophets spoke for God about the judgment, the consequences, and the punishments the timeframe could be

- short term
- longer term
- or even some time in the distant future, the end times.

In the Thessalonians, we have St. Paul telling them, “nobody says the end times are now ... get back to work, get a life, work for the kingdom!” [my wording!]

In the gospel we have Jesus being the *prophet of all prophets*.

He covers many different time frames in this one story.

He talks about how the disciples will be treated – persecuted, even killed.

That happens as soon as he is gone – the early church is persecuted by the Jews and by the Romans and just about anywhere it goes in the world.

Jesus also tells of a medium term event – the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem.

That was accomplished just 44 years after Jesus died when the Romans came in and sacked the city and “**left not a stone upon a stone**” in the temple, right there were Jesus was preaching to them. Flat as a pancake!

Jesus also cautions them to not try to guess when the end times will come.

He tells them:

“See that you not be deceived, for many will come in my name saying, ‘I am he’, and ‘The time has come’. Do not follow them!”

Do you recall the fears when we came to the year 2000?

Oh my goodness, some people were going nuts over it!

“It’s the end of the world.”

We also have book after book in that last 20 years talking about and speculating about when is it going to happen.

Yet, Jesus warns us to not waste time trying to figure out when the end times will happen.

So, where are we, here in 2013 on the prophecy cycle?

Are we doom and gloom?

Are we a people of hope?

To answer that I would like to go back to Jesus, *priest, prophet and king*.

Jesus came to break this tragic cycle of going around in a circle and not getting anywhere.

What did Jesus do?

He clarified in the most simple way what God meant for us to do in this life.

He reminded us again of the two great commandments:

Love God and love your neighbor.

He told us that he would be with us – to enlighten and encourage us.

Sure enough, we have his presence through words in Scripture and through the gift of himself in the Eucharist.

That presence of Christ's life with us is simply called "grace".

Grace is there to help us.

We cannot lift ourselves by our bootstraps.

But Jesus is there with a life line to pull us up – we just have to hang on!

I sort of view this as Jesus 3-D.

Instead of going around in circles and getting nowhere, Jesus is there to pull us closer to God in spite of the cycles in life.

I have a simple prop to try to help me explain this.

Yes, it's just a child's toy, a slinky.

It goes round, round and round.



Each circle in the slinky is like the one that is so common in the stories of the prophets – blessed, transgression, warning, judgment and restoration.

The difference here is that Jesus is pulling us closer and closer to God as we go round and round.

It's like he is pulling us by a rope.
We're not stuck in a rut any more.

There is a down side.

If we are not hanging on to that rope from Jesus we can move farther away
from God,
... and farther
... harming our neighbors
... ignoring God
... getting worse and worse.

My prayer for each of us is to grab onto that rope and make progress to the Lord.

What should we do today?

There's a whole list of things we can do!

At this moment of time we could show love of God by finding some time to
pray each day.

At this moment of time we could show our love of neighbor by contributing
something to the relief of the suffering people in the Philippines.

At this moment we can recall what we heard at the parish revival, "don't pick
up the snake – he will bite you!"

At this moment I am sure we all have our own ideas of how we can better
cooperate with the Lord.

The objective: grow closer to God!

Love God and love your neighbor

– today, tomorrow, ... and always.