

14. July 2024

The fate of the prophets

Am 7:12-15

Amazi'ah said to Amos, "O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, and eat bread there, and prophesy there; but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom." Then Amos answered Amazi'ah, "I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son;[a] but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees, and the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'

The Lord chooses His prophets and sends them where He wants them to go. Even if the prophet tries to evade the call or even refuses to fulfil it, the Lord's choice stands. In the case of Amos, God's choice went to a shepherd with no special position. He was not one of the well-known prophets, nor was he the son of one of them. Today we would say he was simply a "layman". Amos did not fit in with the expectations of the authorities at Bethel. He did not proclaim what they wanted to hear.

This is often the case with true prophets... In this way they distance themselves from the pretensions of those who represent political or religious power and are happy to be validated in their actions. True prophets, on the other hand, depend solely on the will of God and are therefore free.

The Lord will say at the time of the New Covenant: *"If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed"* (Jn 8:36). And so it is! Only the authentic bond with the Lord sets us free to follow the truth, without compromising in any way with lies and deception, whoever spreads them. Likewise, the prophet will only be free if he is totally bound to God.

Certainly, the lot of prophets is not an easy one. They are often at odds with what is "politically correct", so they have to swim against the tide and be a sign of contradiction. And often they are not only at odds with the "mainstream", but their lives are in danger. Not a few give it up for the Lord and for the mission entrusted to them.

We must remember that "*the light shines in the darkness*" (Jn 1:5) and, as Scripture says, the darkness "*did not receive it*" (cf. Jn 1:11). In the case of the prophets, this light of God falls on the shadows of men and calls them to conversion. This is where the difficulty lies! As long as you only confirm people and tell them what they want to hear, you will be considered a good prophet. This is what the court prophets and the priests were like. But as soon as you start talking about repentance and God's judgement, the situation changes, because the way people think and act is called into question! They do not realise that through the rebuke of the prophets, God offers His help and that we can always return to Him. Whoever listens to the true prophets will go the way of God or return to Him. Those who do not listen to them have not recognised the hour of grace.

It is clear that the Son of God is already foreshadowed in the prophets. Jesus also called people to repentance (cf. Mk 1:14-15) and was not afraid to point out their bad attitudes to the religious authorities (cf. Mt 23:13-36). We all know what they did to Him. Like many prophets, they killed Him.

And what about prophets today? In the New Testament they are still mentioned (cf. Eph 4:11), but in the course of Church history they are hardly distinguished. In general, the hierarchy of the Church seems sufficient to cover all areas, but there are always special vocations, directly chosen by God, who come to the aid of the Church. God's interventions through the apparitions of the Virgin Mary also have this prophetic character.

But all Christians share the prophetic dimension of the Church, as witnesses to the world of the coming of the Saviour and His return at the end of time. There may also be times and circumstances in which the witness of the faithful, who must proclaim their fidelity to the truth proclaimed in the Gospel, is particularly necessary. When the crisis of the ecclesiastical hierarchy becomes more and more widespread, as is unfortunately the case at present, the witness of the faithful can become an indispensable prophetic corrective. In this way they would be acting in continuity with the prophets of the Old Testament.