

The past two weekends the Scripture readings have centered on the theme of call and response to discipleship. But how do we do this? This weekend’s first reading from the Book of Deuteronomy and the Gospel story answer this question.

Each Sunday, and on the other major feasts of the Church, following the proclamation of the Scriptures and the homily, we collectively respond to the Word of God by proclaiming the ancient statement known as the “Nicene Creed” or alternately, the baptismal statement, the “Apostles Creed.” In the Nicene Creed’s section on the person and work of the third person of the Blessed Trinity, the Holy Spirit, we proclaim him as the one who has “spoken through the prophets.” In proclaiming this, we state that God has chosen and continues to choose human beings to be his “mouthpiece.” When it comes to “the prophets” we likely think of figures such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the others whose Biblical books bear their names and which are proclaimed at Mass.

But while acknowledging the prophets of our biblical and church history, the article on “prophets” in the Creed is not “time specific”!

In the Rite of Baptism of Infants following the immersion into, or the pouring of, water the newly baptized is anointed with Sacred Chrism signifying their incorporation into the person of Jesus, now corporately present in the world through the Church. In this anointing the Church prays that the baptized share fully in Christ’s threefold mission as priest, prophet, and servant king. In today’s first reading Moses tells the people that God will raise up a prophet like him to continue bringing God’s message to the world. In today’s Gospel Jesus is revealed as the fulfillment of God’s promise through Moses. Through his word driving out a demon from a possessed man, Jesus reveals that God’s kingdom has come and points to its ultimate victory over the powers of sin and death that have held the world in their grip. Through our baptism and confirmation each of us has received this same gift and power of the Holy Spirit and, equally, are joined to Jesus in his on-going work of salvation. A prophet is not a fortune

teller or an astrologer—predicting personal or collective futures, like such well-known characters as Nostradamus and the like. While a prophet may point out consequences in the future if certain attitudes or forms of human behavior continue, prophets are not in the business of doing horoscopes or fortune telling. That’s the stuff of the comic pages in the newspaper, the Sci Fi channel on cable, or creative websites, not the Biblical or the living Teaching Tradition of the Church.

In the recent revision of the Mass, Pope Benedict XVI acting on the recommendation of the world’s bishops has added two formulas which conclude the celebration of the Mass and send us forth into our daily lives. “Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord” and “Go in peace, glorifying God by your life” we are charged. Pope Paul VI famously said, “What the world needs is witnesses.” This is what being a prophet is all about— going into and acting in the world as a witness to the Gospel. Such witnessing presumes a personal relationship with God nurtured through prayer, reading and reflection on the Scriptures and on-going study and faith formation regardless of our age, especially as all recent church documents have strongly pointed out for those of us who are adults.

Being a prophet means taking the time, for example, to read, reflect and apply the teaching set forth by our country’s Bishops in their document on political responsibility for us as Catholics in an election year, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* available on the official web-site of the United States Conference of Bishops, which addresses the whole gamut of life-issues that as faithful Catholics we are called to embrace and promote in the face of a media and political climate that distorts it or isolates it to one or two issues. Prophets are parents who strive consistently to model faithful Catholic values and behavior for their children. Prophets are professional or business persons who model ethical behavior and treatment of employees despite pressures to compromise. Prophets are young adults who courageously stand for Gospel values in a culture permeated by narcissism. Our world, our nation, our city, needs “witnesses” “prophets”—and it is upon us that God ‘s Spirit has been poured and sends us forth as prophets today.