

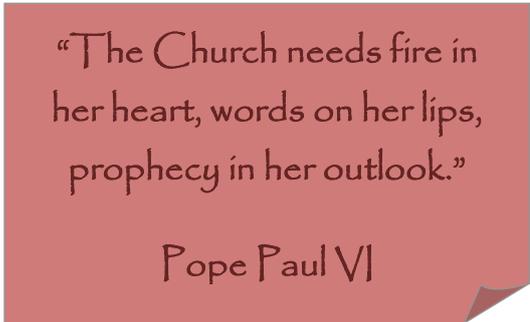
THE CHARISM OF PROPHECY

From the early days, The Alton Day of Renewal has been blessed and guided by the charism or gift of prophecy. But what is prophecy? One simple definition is “a gift of speaking a message from God inspired by the Holy Spirit.” St Paul valued prophecy: “let love be your highest goal, but also desire the special abilities the spirit gives, especially the gift of prophecy (1 Cor 14:1). As Cardinal Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI) explained in 2000: “In every age the Church has received the charism of prophecy, which must be scrutinized but not scorned.”

True prophecy can never be in contradiction to the Scriptures or to the official teaching of the Church; but - in common with all the charisms - it should be used in a loving way to build up the faithful. For example, by helping them to grasp the significance of particular aspects of Scripture or Church teaching in particular situations.

“A prophetic word can change your life. Prophecy if delivered correctly should always edify, encourage and comfort.” *Geoff and Gina Poulter.*

“I discovered that God actually speaks into our lives in a personal and powerful way”. *Charles Whitehead.*



“The Church needs fire in her heart, words on her lips, prophecy in her outlook.”

Pope Paul VI

Catechism of the Catholic Church:

“...even if Revelation is already complete, it has not been made fully explicit; it remains for Christian faith gradually to grasp its full significance over the course of the centuries” (No. 66).

“Throughout the ages, there have been so-called ‘private’ revelations, some of which have been recognized by the authority of the Church... It is not their role to complete Christ's definitive Revelation, but to help live more fully by it in a certain period of history” (No. 67).

Types of Prophecy

Prophecy is usually not about *foretelling* the future, but about *forth-telling* God's word. In its simplest form, prophecy is words of encouragement or comfort, often based on words of Scripture. This is what was spoken about by St Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:3 “those who prophesy speak to other people for their building up and encouragement and consolation.” Everyone can do this, and should be ready to be used by God in this way.

Another dimension to this type of prophecy is when a special grace of revelation is given to someone, for example through a *Word of Knowledge* about the existence or cause of an illness. Speaking out this word increases faith and builds a trustful expectation that the Lord will act through a deed of power such as healing, deliverance or a miracle.

In addition, some people are specially called to a prophetic ministry, when God chooses them to give a message to the church or wider society. This message may also be one of encouragement edification (building up) and consolation (comfort); but in addition it may be a call to repentance or a warning to heed the signs of the times, though not necessarily the prediction of future events.

Pope Francis emphasizes the need for prophets in the Church

Vatican City, Dec 16, 2013 In his morning meditation preached in the Santa Marta chapel, Pope Francis emphasized the need for prophets in the Church in order to prevent a negative spirit of legalism from taking over.

At the conclusion of his meditation Pope Francis prayed: "May our prayer in these days be: 'Lord, let there not be a lack of prophets among your people!' All of us who are baptized are prophets. Lord, may we not forget your promise; may we never grow weary of going forward; may we never close ourselves in through a legality that closes doors. Lord, free your people from the spirit of clericalism and come to their aid through your spirit of prophecy."

Earlier in his meditation, Pope Francis had explained: "the prophet is a man whose eye is opened, and who hears and speaks the words of God, who knows how to see into the moment and to go forward into the future. But first he has listened, he has heard the word of God".

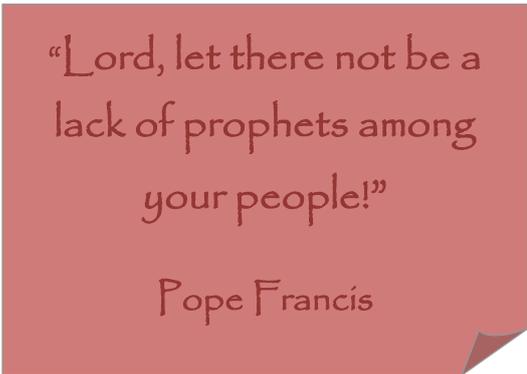
The prophet holds "these three moments within himself," the Pope said: past, present and future. He explained: "The past: the prophet is aware of the promise and he holds God's promise in his heart, he keeps it alive, he remembers it, he repeats it. He then looks into the present, he looks at his people and he experiences the power of the spirit to speak a word to them that will lift them up, to continue their journey toward the future".

Therefore, the Pope said, "the prophet is a man of three times: the promise of the past, the contemplation of the present, the courage to point out the path toward the future".

"When there is no prophecy, the emphasis falls on legality; the priests in the Gospel of Matthew (21:33-27) went to Jesus to ask him for his legal card: 'By what authority are you doing these things?' they asked him". Pope Francis continued: "It is as if they'd said to him: 'We are in charge of the masters of the temple; as for you, by what authority do you do these things?' They did not understand the prophecies, they had forgotten the promise. They did not know how to read the signs of the present moment, they did not have eyes opened nor did they hear the word of God. They only had authority".

"It was the same in Samuel's day," he added, "when the word of the Lord was rare and there was no frequent vision. Legality and authority. When there is no prophecy among the people, clericalism fills the void. It is precisely this clericalism that asks Jesus: 'by what authority do you do these things, by what legal authorization?' The memory of the promise and hope to go forward are reduced only to the present: neither the past, nor a future and hope".

The Pope then said: "Perhaps the people of God who believed, who went to the temple to pray, in their hearts were mourning the fact that they didn't find the Lord. Prophecy was missing. They mourned in their hearts as had Anna, the mother of Samuel, asking that the people might be made



"Lord, let there not be a lack of prophets among your people!"

Pope Francis

fruitful with that fruitfulness that comes from the power of God, when he reawakens in us the memory of his promise and moves us toward the future with hope. This is the prophet. This is the man whose eye is opened, and who hears the words of God”.

Full text:

http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/cotidie/2013/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie_20131216_eye-opened.html

Prophecy and private revelations

The following is an extract from Vatican Document “The Message of Fatima” by **Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger**, *Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith*. 26 June 2000.

The oldest letter of Saint Paul which has been preserved, perhaps the oldest of the New Testament texts, the First Letter to the Thessalonians, seems to me to point the way [to a positive definition of private revelations]. The Apostle says: “Do not quench the Spirit, do not despise prophesying, but test everything, holding fast to what is good” (5:19-21). In every age the Church has received the charism of prophecy, which must be scrutinized but not scorned.

On this point, it should be kept in mind that prophecy in the biblical sense does not mean to predict the future but to explain the will of God for the present, and therefore show the right path to take for the future. A person who foretells what is going to happen responds to the curiosity of the mind, which wants to draw back the veil on the future. The prophet speaks to the blindness of will and of reason, and declares the will of God as an indication and demand for the present time. In this case, prediction of the future is of secondary importance. What is essential is the actualization of the definitive Revelation, which concerns me at the deepest level.

The prophetic word is a warning or a consolation, or both together. In this sense there is a link between the charism of prophecy and the category of “the signs of the times”, which Vatican II brought to light anew: “You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky; why then do you not know how to interpret the present time?” (*Lk* 12:56). In this saying of Jesus, the “signs of the times” must be understood as the path he was taking, indeed it must be understood as Jesus himself. To interpret the signs of the times in the light of faith means to recognize the presence of Christ in every age. In the private revelations approved by the Church—and therefore also in Fatima—this is the point: they help us to understand the signs of the times and to respond to them rightly in faith.

Complete document available here:

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000626_message-fatima_en.html

“Prophecy explains the will of God for the present and shows the right path to take for the future”

Pope Benedict XVI