

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

The Words Of God

Prophets are people who speak God's words. They do not do this impersonally, like a fax-machine or a recorded message over the telephone. They speak with their own authority fully committed, and what they say resounds, not just with their own authority, but with the power of God.

Real Clout

Last week we were meditating on the calling of the first disciples, and the huge authority Jesus displayed, so that they left everything and followed him. This week we see the Lord teaching in the synagogue and "making a deep impression" because he speaks with authority beyond that of the Scribes. What is it about him that so unmistakably grips his hearers? I think it is something to do with the fact that he can speak confidently in the name of his Father, in a way no other human being ever could. We must always speak tentatively when we talk of God. In some way, when Jesus speaks about God, he is speaking from his own heart. At first, you could be forgiven for thinking that he was just a very powerful human being. But that did not seem enough to those who stayed with him. *There is something greater than Solomon here* was a line Jesus spoke, but it must have been in the minds of others. It was not so much the things that he said - parallels of the words of Jesus can be found in the Old Testament. It was his tone, the modality of his address, the way in which he demanded assent, the way in which he expected to be heard. *I tell you most solemnly* is the way our translation puts it. It is as if he *expects* to be believed, not because he is megalomaniac, or vain, or self-obsessed, but because he knows he speaks the *absolute* truth.

Does God Need Prophets?

God can speak without the aid of a human voice - there is nothing to prevent his free communication with his Creation. But it has not been the will of God that the Creation should be overwhelmed by direct messages from him; instead, he has made messengers of human beings, who speak in earthly tones to the earth. In the very advent of these messages, therefore, God displays their consequence; because the prophets are people who have already made the message their own; in them we can contemplate what God's message demands.

Jesus, Word Made Flesh

In the afterglow of Christmas we can see the doctrine of the Incarnation in the figure of Jesus, as he begins to proclaim the Gospel. His authority, from the beginning, stops people in their tracks. He will always be someone you can't ignore. The full reason for this is nothing else than his identity as the Word of God made flesh. He speaks, and all who are alive have to listen, and then start to ask *Who can this be?*

The Demons Know Him

One of the most intriguing themes in the Gospel is the relationship of Jesus to evil spirits. If human beings are "impressed" by him, the demons are overwhelmed. They scream, are convulsed, find themselves in flight before him. Why should evil spirits see him more clearly than his fellow-humans? Evangelists think that, as spirits, they knew his spiritual reality in ways that were cloaked for us. The power of Jesus in the spiritual realm is presented as very real. Just as we find the power of God over suffering most important when we ourselves suffer, perhaps we are in a position to know the power of God over evil most clearly when we are possessed by evil. Jesus himself bears witness to this. He was at his most powerful when confronting the *openly* evil; specious virtue he found untreatable. He is, perhaps, most a prophet, most expressive of God, when he says: *I have not come to call the virtuous, but sinners.* Such an approach rings with divine authority. *Fr Philip*