

**Father Brad Neely**  
**4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**Peter and Paul: Cycle A: Jan 30, 2011**  
**Zeph 2:3, 3:12-13; 1Cor 1: 26-31; Mt 5: 1-12a**

The Scriptures placed together for the liturgy today work so very well together. The first reading from Zephaniah, and Paul's letter to the Corinthians, help form us to truly enter into the beautiful but difficult world of the Beatitudes. It is very interesting when we delve into Scripture--- especially the Old Testament--- and find situations that are similar to today. The first reading is from the prophet Zephaniah. He lived in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC. The nation of Israel, was at that time, involved in a wave of religious degradation. Old idolatries had returned, with people worshipping the sun, moon, and stars. Zephaniah's prophecy warns of doom for those disregarding the one true God. But this prophecy is also laced with hope--- that God will save a faithful remnant. Zephaniah says:  
*"Seek the LORD, all you humble of the earth, who have observed his law; seek justice, seek humility; perhaps you may be sheltered on the day of the LORD's anger. . . . I will leave as a remnant in your midst a people humble and lowly, who shall take refuge in the name of the LORD. . ."*  
In this short passage, Zephaniah mentions humility three times. When Scripture scholars find a word used repeatedly, it often times points to the author's intention of *emphasis*.

The topic of humility is also known to our dear friend Paul. In our second reading today, from his 1<sup>st</sup> letter to the Corinthians, he takes note of how they are living, and how that compares to living **in** Christ. I checked back on my seminary notes from a class studying the letters of Paul,

and found this concerning the qualities of Corinthian Christians of the time: conceited, stubborn, pushy, exasperating, have a positive genius for misunderstanding Paul, and promote highly re-creative heresies." (**Murphy O'Connor**).

They sound like a great bunch of folks! Paul addresses the Corinthians:  
*"....God chose the weak of the world to shame the strong, and God chose the lowly and despised of the world, those who count for nothing, to reduce to nothing those who are something, so that **no human being might boast before God**. It is due to him that you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, as well as righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, so that, as it is written, "*Whoever boasts, should boast in the Lord.*"*  
So, when boasting of something good, don't forget the **source** of all goodness!

Humility before God is quite crucial. In Latin, *humus* means "earth." We are created by divine life, are physical beings on the earth, and invited to freely assent to return to our origins amidst divine life. Here are a couple of observations that can help form the basis of humility:  
\* We didn't create our own existence.  
If we want to pridefully say that our parents created us by their union, we have to ask where they came from, and so on, until we ultimately reach a "first cause" of human existence.  
\* We don't create our existence after death.  
I don't know of anyone who has their "afterlife" all personally planned out, written, and signed by a notary. We can "choose" pathways to our eternal existence, but we don't "create" our existence after death.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, as I've mentioned in the past, defines humility as:  
"the virtue by which a Christian acknowledges that God is the author of all good. Humility avoids inordinate ambition or pride,

and provides the foundation  
for turning to God in prayer.”  
Within the past 5 ½ years here,  
I’ve mentioned humility a number of times.  
Why humility so much?  
Without looking for it in particular,  
in the course of our everyday lives,  
we hear about, and see so much,  
lack of it.

\*Atheists are rearing their heads  
in very public ways,  
claiming no God exists at all---  
\*Agnostics are wondering whether  
to believe in a God or not---  
\*Man is more and more usurping  
the sovereignty of God  
by determining whether someone lives or not,  
either at the beginning of life,  
or at the end---  
\*Disregard of God’s law concerning life and morals  
is running rampant---  
\*Many who **do** assent to the existence of God  
are living their lives “on lukewarm.”

And even in the midst of all this,  
there is much good in the world,

and there are many, many good people.  
Our ears ARE saturated daily with bad news,  
but there is much good happening also.  
However, societies do slide off the rails at times.  
For Israel, in the 7<sup>th</sup> century before Christ,  
a prophet was needed  
to remind them who they were  
in the scheme of the larger picture.

We, today, also need prophetic voices  
and prophetic actions  
to keep the *truth* of life out in the public marketplace.  
Parents need to be prophets to their children,  
and v.v. on occasion.  
Husbands and wives need to be prophets for each other.  
Friends need to be prophets for each other.  
There is a definition of “prophet”  
tied to those in Old Testament times  
heralding the goodness of God.  
In considering the traditional definition,  
and how that translates into our lives of faith today,  
\*to be a prophet is to follow  
in the example of Christ in word and deed.  
\*to be a prophet is to counteract evil with good.  
\*to be a prophet is to know the source of goodness.  
\*to be a prophet is to live in humility before God.