

Prophet Hosea

Introduction: I am dividing my homily into two parts: one relating to the prophets and later after the gospel the Jesus prayer.

It is helpful to remember that Jesus grew up as a practising Jew and grew up in the time of the Roman occupation. He, like prophets from the past, for this is one of the many roles attributed to Jesus — knew Israel's history—her ups and her downs in fulfilling her covenant with God. The role of the Jewish prophets found in the writings of the "Old Testament" was to call wayward Israel back to covenantal fidelity. This is summarized in the Shema: *You shall love the Lord your God above all other Gods and you shall love your neighbour as yourself.*

During this period. There were four prophets expressing their interpretation of god's will to the people: Hosea, Micah and Isaiah. They continued to call the people back to their relationship to God. They will also call them to be honest and humble in word and deed.

The House of David and Solomon is divided now in the period of these prophets between Judah and Israel . Not only is it no longer one nation but there is a breakdown in the ownership of the land. Tribal boundaries and family ownership is disappearing and a rise of a wealthy class on the backs of the many poor is forming. And more and more there is a lack of concern for the poor and disenfranchised and the prophets hear from God and tell the people:

Amos declares God's words: *Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.(5:24)*

Isaiah: *seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow. (1:17)*

Micah:*what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God.(6:8)*

And today's reading from Hosea comes out from what he heard from the from the Lord:

Hosea: *I have been the Lord your God ever since the land of Egypt; you know no God but me and besides me thee is no savior. (13:4)*

But Israel is not acting as if she remembered her relationship to God, for there is a flourishing of what we might call "religious pluralism" which is a way of saying that the people forgot yet again, they were not to worship any other gods and they were worshipping the Canaanite god Baal for rain and the fertility of the land.

In today's reading Hosea is told to marry a promiscuous woman and in this way God is demonstrated what his relationship is like to Israel. He, God, remains faithful, while Israel did not! Remember these were firmly rooted patriarchal times—God was male and Israel was female and seen as the unfaithful wife.....God remained true to God's promise to his part of the covenant with Israel, which was like a marriage vow. Whether it is a metaphor or not, for many verses all looks doom and gloom for the house of Israel with the Lord speaking through Hosea saying he will have no pity on them, *they are not my people and I am not their God*. But then God reclaims his own faithfulness even though the people are not. "Yet the number of the people of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea..."

Over and over again the prophets play a critical role in renewing Israel's relationship with God. Each story seems to be yet another way to tell this ongoing saga of Israel's waywardness and selective memory.

What do prophets do: they pray (intercede), they predict, they lament the people's waywardness and they proclaim again and again, God's love and forgiveness. However, often the prophets face unpopularity along the way as they confront the people with their misdeeds and sometimes threats of death for declaring the truth!

As Peter J. Gomes writes in his classic *The Good Book*:
The Bible is not a therapy program nor is it a human success story, a moral tale with an inevitably Happy ending. It is the account of a faithless people and a faithful God who seek constantly to renew their relationship with each other.

Jesus knew all these stories and yet continued to hear God's word and faithfully sought to share it in truthful word and deed! For this and so many other acts of playful intercession we are thankful. Amen

LSTC