Fr Matthew Charlesworth, SJ
https://sj.mcharlesworth.fr/

Wednesday of the 12th Week in Ordinary Time

Date: Wednesday, June 26, 2024 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** B
First Reading: 2 Kings 22:8–13, 23:1–3
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 119:33–37, 40 | **Response:** Psalm 119:33a
Gospel Acclamation: John 15:4a, 5b
Gospel Reading: Matthew 7:15–20
Preached at: St Peter Faber Jesuit Community **in the** Archdiocese of Melbourne, Australia**.**

"Beware false prophets" Jesus says. For it is "by their fruits [that] you will know them".

Actions speak louder than words, and hypocrisy and inauthenticity should be warning signs for Christians in their leaders.

You will recall how yesterday Steve intended to intimate how the destruction of the Assyrian army – the 185,000 – was recorded in the Book of Kings as an interpretation by the scribes of God's intervention in the history of Israel to ensure that a remnant would be saved and would remain, from whom David, and the Messiah would descend. It was a tale to invite us to see how God is operating in our lives – in the joyful and in the painful moments – to trust that God is at work behind the scenes.

Well, a century has passed between today's first reading and yesterdays. It concerns how Josiah, the Son of Amon, who became the fifteenth King of Judah when he was but 8 years old, is embarking on a religious reform that will culminate in a renewal of the covenant between his people and God. Josiah – as I'm sure you all know – is important. His name in Hebrew means the LORD God supports. Historically, he's considered one of the best of the "Good Kings" (and there are lots of bad ones so it's important to know which are the good ones). Josiah is considered so good, in fact, that he's likened to Moses. The story picks up when he is 26, having governed for 18 years. He has sought to reform the kingdom – to reorient it towards the true worship of God – after a succession of evil kings under which the people suffered. We're told just before this passage that he's used the taxes of his Kingdom to rebuild the Temple – an act pleasing

CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 · https://sj.mcharlesworth.fr/homilies/2024-06jun-26-yb-ot-12/

to God – and during its reconstruction they rediscover the Book of the Law, which was most probably a scroll from the book of Deuteronomy, that was lost when the Temple was desecrated by an earlier King.

Josiah wants to continue the reform – and realizes that the Book of the Law explains – in Dt 28 – the curses experienced by his people and warns of what will happen if they continue to ignore the commands of the LORD, and so he seeks to continue the reform and to renew the covenant.

What struck me about the reading – and this entire narrative that we read this week in the Lectionary from the 2nd book of Kings – are the conditions described for religious reform to succeed, and to think of the parallels in our own time. It also speaks to the kind of leaders and leadership, the kind of prophets, God desires for his church. Because the reform of religion is the good fruit God expects from us.

The first condition is that the reform must be carried out by a good person. But it was not enough to have a king who was not bad, or only occasionally good, they had to be both just, and a king who would be willing to act. For it would be by their fruits that they would be known. And this is where today's reading narrates the actions of this Good King.

He began with what a just king should do—repairing the temple. Despite his zeal for the temple, he did not want to do it by himself. He knew that true religious reform required that he involve other people. There are a lot of names in these readings – but it's sufficient to note who or what they represent: the palace, the people; the prophets; the temple; the scribes; and the priests – all the different sections of society in other words. Josiah, on finding the book of the law, allows it to be consulted by all these different groups and eventually has it read out to all the people. Therefore, the religious reform is not seen as a "palace coup" by the Temple. As the Jesuit Peter Dubovský explains "The lengthy list of officials shows that [both] palace and temple administration [were] involved." But there was one more approval that was needed – and it's skipped over in the readings – but it involves the Prophetess Huldah who authenticates the book of the law and prophesies the future of destruction for failure to follow it. She concludes by reassuring King Josiah that due to his piety God has heard his prayer, and he will be spared the destruction that is waiting for failing to adhere to the covenant, i.e. the fall of Jerusalem and the exile of the Jewish people into Babylon. I mention

CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 · https://sj.mcharlesworth.fr/homilies/2024-06jun-26-yb-ot-12/

Huldah because – according to scholars – this incident is the first time that parts of it are declared to be Holy Scripture – and it was a woman who gives the King the final confirmation. So, in summary, this story shows that for a reform of such scope, it was necessary to have an appropriate king, the collaboration of temple and palace officials, and the approval of a prophetess representing a different voice, and the participation and listening of all the people, so that the covenant, the promises made, might be fulfilled and honoured anew.

I do not know about you, but this sounds a lot like the Synodality process that Pope Francis is currently engaged in. How he is encouraging listening to the Holy Spirit speaking through the baptized; how experts are beginning to be consulted and listened to from different fields when teachings are expounded; how he is consulting clergy, bishops and theologians, and how he is feeding back and listening some more. We're told that Synodality is rooted in the New Testament accounts of the Church, but on thinking through the reign of Josiah, I think it's also got some ancestry in the Old Testament too.

Jesus declares that false prophets are known not by their words but by their deeds in keeping the law, which he summarized earlier as:

> "[L]ove the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself." (Mt 22:37-40)

In an age of "alternative facts" and individualism to the point of rejecting all authority – how important is it to recognize God's decrees and the importance of faithfulness and justice, truth, beauty and God's actions in our world again.

We're told in 2nd Kings that "Before [Josiah] there was no king like him who turned to the LORD with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses" (2 Ki 23:25)

For kings and prophets, as for all God's people then and now, covenant fidelity consists in keeping God's statutes and decrees with their whole hearts and souls, to, as Jesus tells us, "do to others as you would have them do to you, for this is the Law and the Prophets." (Mt 7:12)

CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 · https://sj.mcharlesworth.fr/homilies/2024-06jun-26-yb-ot-12/

Let’s pray that we might as the Psalm suggests, always delight in keeping God’s decrees and be blest with the gifts of discernment to always observe them well.

Let us also pray for Pope Francis, and the Synodal processes underway, and the apostolic planning in our provinces – that our actions, and plans of action, might always help us towards drawing nearer to God and to carrying out his decrees; in short to know God’s will and to do it.

Let us finally give thanks for the fruit that has been borne in our lives, and for those which we bear for the sake of others – I’m thinking especially of those we were privileged to serve in our experiments recently. Let us pray for those people, that the seeds of God’s Word we sowed with them might bear abundant fruit in their lives too.

Amen.

Source: https://sj.mcharlesworth.fr/homilies/2024-06jun-26-yb-ot-12/

This homily is shared for personal and pastoral use. Please attribute the author and do not alter the meaning when quoting. If you wish this homily to be translated - there is an option on the website which will allow you to translate it into the language of your choice.

Licenced under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) license.

The author does not speak for the Society of Jesus or for the Catholic Church.

Receive Fr Matthew Charlesworth's Homilies on **WhatsApp**

Receive Fr Matthew Charlesworth's Homilies on **Telegram**

Receive Fr Matthew Charlesworth's Homilies on **Signal**

Scan for Website on **Clearnet**

Scan for Onion Mirror **via TOR**