

Sometimes in life, it can be easy to get frustrated with the world or the people around us, be they our families, or even the larger world. We might think what can I do to change this person, or to change that situation? But the reality is when we don't give up, but take our call to be a prophet seriously and bring hope into this world by doing our part to change it for the better, that, combined with the power of God, can truly bear amazing fruits.

Some years ago in Wisconsin, lived a man named Bernard Casey, who went by "Barney." He was born on a farm in November of 1870 in the town of Oak Grove. Eventually the family moved to Hudson, and by the time he was 17 he left the farm for a series of jobs working as a lumberjack, a prison guard, and a street car operator in Superior.

One day while he was driving the streetcar through a tough section of Superior, he came upon a drunken sailor who was stabbing a young woman. The sailor was apparently cursing hysterically as well.

This image had a powerful impact on him. He looked at this situation and saw not hopelessness but rather a call to action. According to his biographer, James Derum, the actions of the sailor symbolized sin and hate in the world and man-made misery, and that from this, he saw "that the only cure for mankind's crime and wretchedness was the love that can be learned only from and through Him who died to show men what love is." He took this as a call to study for the priesthood.

And so he entered the seminary, initially wanting to serve a diocese. The Archdiocese of Milwaukee put him in a high school seminary at first, due to his lack of formal education. The only problem? Classes were taught in German or Latin and he knew neither. He was advised to join a religious order if he wanted to become a priest. He lugged a trunk to Detroit where he felt called to go to, in 1897 took the name of Saint Francis Solanus, a 17th century Spanish nobleman and preacher and He was eventually ordained in July of 1904, but was ordained what was known as a "simplex" priest - meaning he was a priest but not given faculties to hear confessions or to preach, but rather could offer Mass. When he was moved to Detroit there were 200 people a day to sign up for Mass intentions. He was flooded with visitors. Each Wednesday afternoon, he conducted well-attended services for the sick, and through these services, he became known for his great compassion and the amazing results of his consultations with visitors. During his 21 years as porter at St. Bonaventure, he filled seven notebooks with more than 6,000 requests for help from petitioners. And to some 700 of these he recorded reported cures from cancer, leukemia, tuberculosis, diphtheria, arthritis, blindness, and other maladies. He may even be a reason Chevrolet is still in business. In 1925 the firm was near bankruptcy when an auto worker, John McKenna, who feared losing his job, enrolled Chevrolet into the Seraphic Mass Association for 50 cents. Two nights later the company got an order for 45,000 machines. The notes from his life also report conversions of fallen-away churchgoers and favorable resolutions of domestic and business problems. All this from simply listening and consulting people, and praying with them.

Bro. Leo Wollenweber, a Franciscan Cappuchin., who lived with Fr. Solanus and served for many years as with him once related how Fr. Solanus would discern God's will during a visit with a person seeking a favor. was talking to him asking for a favor, he'd look up and look off into space. According to another priest who knew him, Fr. Larry Webber, he was trying to discern what God was saying in that moment, then he'd come back to the person and he'd say, either, 'Don't worry, everything will be fine,' or if someone would not be healed or would die, he'd say to them, 'You know, sometimes God calls us to trust Him.'

He'd also go out to meet people. He went to a farm once in the suburbs to get apples or vegetables for the Capuchin Soup Kitchen. He had a driver who had taken him out to the farm to pick up the produce, and as they were driving back, it was said like a good Irishman, he told the driver to stop at the bar so they could have a beer. This wasn't for the beer though. He knew the owner of the bar was Catholic, and had been away from the church. According to Fr. Larry, he did nothing religious. He just talked with the man. He knew that this man needed to be brought back to the church, and his presence moved the man so much that he changed his life and became more faithful. That simple action though was enough combined with God's grace. As Fr. Larry puts it, "sometimes it was that simple ministry of presence - to Catholics and non-Catholics alike - that made all the difference." All he did was to stop at the bar for a beer, but being there dressed in his habit, it reached that bar owner and brought him back to the faith.

"That was the gift he had — listening intently to God," Fr. Webber continued. "He had this understanding of prophecy in the sense that everything would all turn out according to God's will."

He loved to kneel before the Eucharist in the quiet of the night; Father Benedict Groeschel, himself a well known author and speaker and later fixture on EWTN, once recalled visiting the convent on a warm night and being unable to sleep. Around 3:00am, Groeschel took a walk and arrived at the chapel where he put on two lights and saw Casey kneeling on the top step of the altar. Groeschel observed him for several moments and noted that Casey didn't move – Groeschel simply flicked the lights off to leave Casey to his prayer.

He continued to answer letters, and help people, one at a time. He was diagnosed with skin cancer in January of 1956, and he entered eternal life the following July of 1957.

What his story goes to show you is the power that one person can have when they take their call to be a prophet seriously. He could have looked at what happened on that day in Superior when he saw that act of violence and thought "what can I do?" He could have taken his treatment from his seminary instructors as demeaning and left in anger. But instead he used what God gave him, and what a difference he made and continues to make for so many.

God has called us all to be prophets, and a prophet is not someone who yells and shouts at people, or harasses them for their political or religious stances, or who is a keyboard warrior yelling on social media. A prophet is someone who is willing to lead by example, to challenge, to listen, and to ultimately say what needs to be said even when it might be a difficult message for that person or persons to hear.

In the first reading this week, we meet Ezekiel the prophet and hear of his call. Ezekiel listens, and he is told by God to go to his own people to speak to them for they have become rebellious and obstinate of heart. On top of this, God does not promise that his mission will seemingly be successful, but He does say to Ezekiel that they will know that a prophet has been among them.

Jesus of course is a prophet too but also our Redeemer. And in the Gospel, now into His ministry, you'd think word might have got back home to Nazareth about the good work Jesus is doing. But what is the reaction of the people? Not wanting to listen to Jesus, but rather being astounded not in a good way, but in a "who does he think he is" kind of way? They dismiss him as being insignificant, the son of a carpenter and Mary, and so tune him out.

Here's the thing though: while both missions seemingly at the time, that of Ezekiel and that of Jesus do not bring results immediately, we've seen the results since then. Millions of people eventually listened, from the audience Ezekiel spoke to to the bar owner that Fr. Solanus spoke to. And this happens because of God's grace but also because people take their call to be a prophet seriously. And if you think "well that's not me, I'm not ordained or working in the Church," it is you, because that is the call of all of us. And it is more important than ever in a world where there can be such hostility to the Christian message. But as I've said before, our goal is to not be liked, or to simply not offend - our goal is to get one another to heaven. So how then, does one take the role of being a prophet seriously?

I think a starting point is prayer. In the first reading, Ezekiel writes "as the Lord spoke to me." Prayer is such an important part of our faith, and it can't be limited to simply Sunday Mass. Making time for daily prayer, meditation, or just silence is so important as we discern our vocation, or how to handle situations in life. It brings us closer to God, and helps us to discern his plan.

Second, we need to lead by example. There should be a distinctiveness about being a Catholic - not a "holier than thou" kind of thing, but as Catholics, we are against contraception, we are against abortion, we are for the dignity of the human person so think about immigration carefully, we care about those imprisoned, and we believe in marriage between a man and a woman. This isn't the time to delve into those issues, but the point is that distinctiveness isn't there. About 30% of those who are Catholic go to Mass each week; many more have gone over to evangelical or non-denominational churches for the music or message which is often more like a sales convention pitch than a challenging moral message. On top of this, a Catholic should not only know the content of their faith but live it out. Fr. Benedict Groschel didn't recall a conversation

with Fr. Solanus, but rather just seeing him at prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. So we have to ask ourselves, do our actions speak for who we are, do we have a Catholic identity, or have we just kind of blended into being like everyone else? Can we testify to what we believe in and why and have a discussion with people and be willing to be gossiped about or looked down upon or even hated? Can we set a good example to others by giving freely of our time, by praying for or with them and helping those in need? Under our own roofs, do we send the message that God is at the center of what we do as a family and our faith takes precedence over leisure, sports, work and academics but that faith matters most? Through our witness to the faith both in word and action, we bring people to the faith.

Third, how do we prophet to our own people so to speak? Indeed God was right, the Israelites Ezekiel ministered to were a stiff-necked people, and time and time again in the Old Testament we see their stubbornness or refusal to listen. But the prophets keep coming and God keeps reaching out. Sometimes the toughest people to minister to are in our own families. Every parent knows there's times when they aren't going to be very popular with their children, but they are following their conscience and trying to help their children grow. Well how do we handle situations where we see people making bad moral decisions, or falling away from Mass? We can't be afraid to talk to people, or to even argue with them - which is far different from shouting and attacking. No one, even when part of their conscience whispers to them "this is wrong" likes to hear about something they are doing wrong. But maybe because you challenged them about how they are treating others in the family or their spouse or kids or parents, because you talked to them about what Mass means, because you didn't just let a snide comment about people who are pro-life or anti same-sex marriage go unchallenged, you might help people to think differently.

Lastly, remember the words of Mother Teresa - God calls us not to be successful, but faithful. So many of the prophets seem to end in failure. But we leave the long term success to God. God does amazing things - let's not worry about the end result here and now, but do our job and leave the rest to God.

Some highly intelligent people didn't think others should hear a priest from small town Wisconsin speak at Mass because to them he wasn't all that bright. But looking back, those same people didn't know it at the time, but can truly say a prophet was in their midst - a prophet who through his example, through his conversations, through his patience with others and challenges, helped thousands to turn their lives around and see the power of God in their midst. There's nothing wrong with light hearted conversations, leisure activities with friends and enjoying life. But we aren't called to live the Life of Riley; we are called to live the life of a prophet which leads to sainthood. It's not easy to be disliked, to be treated with anger or even silence. But that's often the first reaction people have when challenged. If our Lord though can be nailed to a tree for us, maybe we can put up with being opposed by some who disagree with us, because in doing so we just might help them find the road to heaven rather than the road to perdition. So may we be faithful, and at the end of our lives hopefully those who look

back at us don't just remember us for our sense of humor, our golf game or cooking, but remember that when they knew us, a prophet was in their midst.

Blessed Solanus Casey, pray for us!