



Λόγος

# LOGOS



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## A MEDITATION: *To Live in Prophetic Times*



Prophets scare me—not in the horror-stricken tales of Stephen King kind of scary, but more in the sense of something that seems so foreign and unknown that the very idea of someone prophesying before me makes me nervous, anxious, and, to the point, scared that such a person might turn my life upside down. I have seen and witnessed many prophets in my life, some self-proclaimed and boisterous, some unassuming and meek, but powerful in their testimony to the gospel they have received.

Each year when I was in college, a man would show up on the grounds of our campus in Virginia (at a public institution!) with a huge wooden cross that he would prop upright and then lean on. He was usually dressed quite simply, his hair and face unkempt, and his demeanor less than friendly. As students

would race to class in their ten-minute interval to jump from one side of campus to the next, he would yell out at us, “Beware the rat race! Look at all of you insignificant rats, scurrying about!”

He was annoying. I needed to get to class and now people were gathering around him to see what he was doing, to hear what kind of inanity would come out of his mouth this time. To them, he was a spectacle. I had just finished my course on the New South in a classroom on the third floor of Morton Hall and needed to cross campus like a track star to get to the second floor of Tucker Hall, the English building—I had timed this trek more than once. There was no time to dawdle. I had already been waylaid by the backup of students on the stairs of Morton (not unlike the backup that happens here in Feinstein or Harkins) and now this man, his cross, and his screaming, were in my way. I was resolute in my determination to ignore him. Head down,



## A MEDITATION: *To Live in Prophetic Times* (CONTINUED)

book bag over my shoulder, I plowed through the growing number of students who had gathered around him—some to mock him, a few to listen, most to gawk at him with incredulity. Just as I made my way through the crowd and into the open circle where he was proselytizing, he yelled out, “When are you going to slow down and do what the Lord asks of you?” “Maybe after Modern Fiction,” I thought to myself, “but right now, I have other things to do.”

Recently, Pope Francis noted in a morning homily how important it was for the People of God to live in prophetic times—to recognize true prophets in our midst—since, in every age, God has never failed to give his people prophets in their times of need. The true prophet is the one who acutely and deeply listens to the Word of God, who can look around and see the suffering of the present time, and who, in what has been heard and seen, can still project hope for a future in relationship with God. The pope warned that when we fail to recognize the prophets in our midst, then that void is often filled with rigorism or clericalism—but even worse, every memory of the past and any hope we might have for the future are eradicated for the sake of the present moment. We fall into that mentality that tells us, “Right now, I have other things to do.” There is no past promise of the covenantal relationship with God, no hope in the future of what that covenant might bring. Only now.

All of those who are baptized are called not only to live in prophetic times, but to be prophets: to listen to the Word, to see the suffering of those around in this present time, and to speak a

word of hope that might rouse the world from its hurting condition. I don’t know if the man I ran past on the quad was a prophet. I do know that he never tired of what he was saying to us. I know that he came back each year, sometimes with his wife and children in tow, and each time told us to slow down. I know that by my senior year, I would actually stop and listen to him—I still thought he was annoying and, indeed, a little bit scary—not because of his appearance, but because of what he was asking me to do. I know that twenty-seven years later I still remember him and the words that he spoke to us as we scurried across the quad like rats in a maze: “When are you going to slow down and do what the Lord asks of you?”

And now, so far removed from that would-be prophet in time and space, his words come back to me as I reflect on what Pope Francis has said. To live in prophetic times is to live outside of the present moment and perhaps even outside of our own sense of “the things we have to do.” Each one of us, in our own way, gets caught up in a rat race of sorts. And, when we do, we find ourselves without time or energy for anything or anyone else. Perhaps, as this New Year begins we can slow down just a bit, look outside of ourselves just a little bit more, and find a pathway in life that allows us to hear the Word of God, to empathize with others in their suffering, and to find hope in the God who has promised to be with us until the end of time. Right now, there is really nothing else to do but that.

Fr. R. Gabriel Pivarnik, O.P.  
*Vice President for Mission and Ministry*

## CHAPLAIN'S MUSINGS: *Mini-Sermons and a Stolen Parking Sign*

Since my earliest days in the Dominican Order, I've loved a Scripture verse from the Old Testament: "When I found your words, I devoured them; your words were my joy, the happiness of my heart, because I bear your name, Lord, God of hosts" (Jer. 15:16). The prophet's description of encountering the Word of God, falling in love with the Lord, and consequently experiencing a deep and abiding happiness has always resonated with me.

A consequence of devouring the Word of God and being consumed by His love and mercy is that one cannot keep those inestimable gifts to himself. An obligation arises whereby the one to whom the Lord has given himself is sent to proclaim the Word to the world. Saint Paul got it right: "Woe to me if I do not preach!" (1 Cor. 9:16).

Here in the Office of the Chaplain/Campus Ministry at Providence College, there's a perpetual effort to find new and effective ways to proclaim the Word to the students entrusted to our care. While we do our best to engage the campus community through traditional forms of preaching, we are constantly looking for other avenues to invite students into a deeper relationship with God. To that end, Father Justin Brophy, O.P., and I have thrown ourselves headlong into the media on campus. He hosts a two-hour weekly radio program on 91.3 WDOM and I write a regular column in *The Cowl*, Providence College's student newspaper.

Pope Paul VI was explicit about the importance of this kind of evangelization. He said: "Pastors should hasten to fulfill their duty in this respect, one which is intimately linked with their ordinary preaching responsibility." If we are serious about our desire to

propose Christ to our students, to explain Catholic teaching, and to invite others to share in the life of the Church, then it's essential to get out there in a whole host of different ways.

We recognize that the students we reach on the air and in print are often not the ones who are going to Mass, and we tailor our messages accordingly. Always brief and relatively simple, these "mini-sermons" are offered in the hope they might help some of our students to inch towards God and deeper relationship with him. We do this with confidence that once students find the Lord's words, they too will devour them and discover that they are the source of joy and happiness in their own lives.

That you might get a better sense of the kind of preaching we're doing in the media on campus, here's an article from *The Cowl* from the past semester. We pray that the Lord might bless our efforts and let them bear fruit in the lives of those in the Providence College community.

It finally happened. Someone stole the sign from my parking spot by the chapel. This has been a great source of irritation for me this week, and I'm choosing to use my allotted space to complain to you, my virtuous readers. I know that none of you would ever commit such an abominable act. But bear with me as I whine.

Every time I've piloted the Chaplain-mobile towards St. Dominic Chapel this week, I've seen a different car in my space. And with no sign posted to threaten ill-mannered motorists, there's nothing I can do. The worst instance of this was when I saw



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my dutiful assistant, Fr. Justin, parked in my once-sacred spot. I asked him what he was doing and he smirked and said, "Sorry, dude. There was no sign there."

Do you know the worst part about this whole villainous episode? It's that I have no right to be upset. I'm embarrassed to admit it, but I was on the criminal end of the same episode back in the day. I think the statute of limitations has run out, so I can finally admit that I had the "Reserved for Chaplain" sign hanging on the wall of my off-campus house way back in 1996. And now the sins of my youth have been visited upon me.

As I drove around Elmhurst each day looking in vain for a parking spot, a Scripture verse kept echoing in my guilty ears: "A person will reap only what he sows." I've been wondering if this is some kind of divine retribution for a seemingly harmless prank committed years ago.

This is not, of course, how God works. Life isn't that simple. We know that bad things happen to good people. And we know that the wicked often prosper. Just look at Christ on the Cross; the most ignoble death was imposed on the most just of all men. There often seems to be no correlation between our actions and the consequences that follow.

So what does it mean to reap what we sow? And why should we bother trying to be good? There are two answers that we need to look at. The first concerns the afterlife. You and I are going to live forever. The place where we spend all eternity – whether heaven or hell – will be determined by both our faith and

our works. We want to sow good seeds that will put us on the road to everlasting glory.

The second reason is a bit subtler. If we make daily efforts to live well, we'll progressively be changed into better people. We may not obtain material blessings or have an easy life. We will not be exempt from suffering in this life. But we'll enjoy some modicum of peace and happiness, the likes of which the wicked will never know.

With all that being said, a final word of absolution to the bandit who made off with my sign. You can keep it. I've got an old one that I can use.

Fr. R. Gabriel Pivarnik, O.P.

*Vice President for Mission and Ministry*

### **Office of Mission and Ministry**

[www.providence.edu/Mission+Ministry](http://www.providence.edu/Mission+Ministry)

[omm@providence.edu](mailto:omm@providence.edu)

401.865.1210

### **Center for Catholic and Dominican Studies**

[www.providence.edu/CCDS/](http://www.providence.edu/CCDS/)

[cdds@providence.edu](mailto:cdds@providence.edu)

401.865.2870

### **Office of the Chaplain / Campus Ministry**

[www.providence.edu/Student+Life/Spiritual+Life/](http://www.providence.edu/Student+Life/Spiritual+Life/)

[chaplain@providence.edu](mailto:chaplain@providence.edu)

401.865.2216

