

Prophetic or prudential action?

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Prophetic or prudential action? As an advocate and activist for faith-based social justice, I struggle more about means rather than ends. My formation in the religious, moral, and social teachings of our faith offers much clarity about ideals. What's uncertain is the path for progress toward those ideals.

Sometimes this is a question of inside versus outside. Sometimes this is a question of pursuing incremental change versus radical change. Sometimes this is a question of the extent that ends can ever justify means. Ultimately, though, these questions boil down to how “prophetic” versus how prudential to be for making progress.

Take the ideal of racial justice, for example. How best do we make progress toward that end? Is it more effective to try to work within the existing system, or is the system itself too resistant to change for the inside path to achieve progress? To paraphrase the former President Reagan, is the system itself the problem? Similarly, will I make more progress toward the ideal by working for incremental changes that are more readily achievable? Or, am I compromised or even complicit by choosing incremental change when the ideal of racial justice holds out a vision that only radical, systemic transformation can bring about? And, how far can I go in the means to reach for that ideal? How does one judge when it is just and effective to break with friends, family, tradition, due process, the will of the majority, or even civil laws and sanctioned authority to make progress toward justice?



These are the questions in struggling with the balance between prudential and prophetic approaches to action. The [readings for this Sunday, July 4th](#), speak to the limits to being prophetic, as well as the inescapable divine call to be prophetic.

In the First Reading (Ez. 2:2-5) the prophet Ezekiel recounts how the “Lord spoke” and “the spirit entered into me and set me on my feet.” Not really wished for, the divine call to prophesize comes powerfully and compellingly. Ezekiel is warned of the dangers all prophets face – ridicule, persecution, rejection, threat. For, the need for prophecy itself lies in our human complacency and resistance to justice. We sinful people are indeed “Hard of face and obstinate of heart.”

In the Epistle, St. Paul in Second Corinthians too speaks of both the power of being called to prophecy and the sufferings that prophets must expect. He writes:

*That I, Paul, might not become too elated,
because of the abundance of the revelations,
a thorn in the flesh was given to me, an angel of Satan,*

*to beat me, to keep me from being too elated.
Three times I begged the Lord about this, that it might leave me,
but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you,
for power is made perfect in weakness." 2 Cor 12:7-10*

And, the Gospel from Mark recounts how Christ returned to his beloved hometown of Nazareth and to the synagogue of his friends, neighbors, and family. Yet, Christ as a prophet finds little welcome and little openness. His words are rejected by the hardened hearts of those who knew him even most intimately. "A prophet is not without honor except in his native place and among his kin and in his own house." Mk 6:1-6

I here publicly confess that I seem constitutionally predisposed to suspect the prophetic and to favor the prudential. I'm inclined to think that the perfect is more often than not an enemy of the good. I wonder too often that those choosing prophetic action over prudential just want to dodge the hard, grey, and often boring work needed to make incremental progress within the system. It's glamorous to shout through a megaphone outside the White House; yet, rolling up your sleeves behind the scenes to win a few small provisions for the homeless in a housing bill is real toil. How naïve, unhelpful, and holier-than-thou those who reject working within the system must be, I sometimes think. Yes, I also easily convince myself that the path of prudential action actually achieves measurable progress while prophetic action seldom does and can too often spark counterproductive reaction.

Sunday's readings, though, bring me up short. They take my breath away. Unmistakably, the message is that the prophetic is imperative.

Prudential action can never be sufficient in itself. It risks getting lost in the trees and losing sight of the forest, confusing means as ends. Prudential action without the judgmental vision of prophecy can too easily settle, can too easily accommodate itself to the status quo, and can too easily become complicit and compromised in its deferral to the system, traditions, existing laws, and even to our natural desire to be liked and approved. I think Christ must have strongly felt that desire among his neighbors in Nazareth.

The readings make clear that prophetic vision cannot be simply set aside if progress is to be made. Progress requires keeping our "eyes on the prize," as the Civil Rights Movement put it so well. Prudential action is in many cases – and perhaps most cases, more efficacious for progress, but the prudential must always be directed by the prophetic and in service to the prophetic. And, yes, there are genuinely moments of enormous inflection when norms of prudence have little role, moments when the voice of the prophet must be the only voice, moments when prophetic action is the only way forward. I vow to listen more for prophets.

Stephen Schneck
Executive Director

Suggested Action:

Meditate this week on the difference between prophetic and prudential action. Where have you heard prophetic voices this past year, or in your life? Are you open to receiving the message from these voices?

Suggested Petitions:

For all of us who are “hard of face and obstinate of heart”; may the grace of the Lord soften us and make us more amenable to Jesus’ message of love. We pray...
May we be open to the prophets speaking to us. We pray...

Collect Prayer

O God, who in the abasement of your Son
have raised up a fallen world,
fill your faithful with holy joy,
for on those you have rescued from slavery to sin
you bestow eternal gladness.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

Amen

This Wednesday: The Covid Vaccine - A Franciscan Perspective

As part of our commitment to address concerns and questions around the Covid-19 Vaccine, while promoting equity in its distribution, the Franciscan Action Network is hosting a panel discussion on **Wednesday, June 30th at 7pm ET (4pm PT)**. Register today for [“The Covid Vaccine: A Franciscan Perspective.”](https://tinyurl.com/2f58vkzb)

We are excited to be joined by **His Eminence, Cardinal Sean Patrick O’Malley, OFM Cap.** who will offer our opening prayer and give us his theological perspective. Additionally, we have a vaccine manufacturing expert, the head of mission and ethics for the Franciscan hospitals of Florida, and the Director of Global Infectious Diseases from Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. [Read more about our distinguished panelists by clicking here.](#)

The panel discussion will be moderated by our own Stephen Schneck, and we will invite questions from the attendees.

We will be recording the event and sending it out to all those who register. [Click here to register for “The Covid Vaccine - A Franciscan Perspective.”](#)

THE COVID VACCINE:
A Franciscan Perspective

Register: <https://tinyurl.com/2f58vkzb>

Join us on Wed. June 30, 2021 at 7pm ET (4pm PT) as we welcome:

Cardinal Sean P. O'Malley, OFM Cap. Maurizio Cattaneo Colleen M. Walters Edward T. Ryan, M.D.

Take Action: Week of Opportunity to Join Immigrants and Allies Fasting for Freedom

The [Fast for Freedom](#) has been underway since June 9, with a group of 11 core fasters (one for each million undocumented

We are Fasting for Freedom

immigrants) spending their days at the Lutheran Church of the Reformation just two blocks from the Capitol. This final week is an opportunity for the faith community to raise their voices loudly in support of a pathway to citizenship.

Here are some [ways to get involved](#):

- **Join us in Prayer:** TODAY, Monday, June 28 at 3p ET (12p PT) Bishop Mario Dorsonville, Chair of the USCCB's Migration Committee will visit and pray with the fasters in Washington, D.C. Please join us in-person or [on Facebook](#).
- **Fast for Freedom on the Phones** June 29 at 3pm ET/ 12pm PT: Make calls urging Congress to include Citizenship for All in the upcoming jobs and infrastructure reconciliation bill. Sample scripts will be provided: [Register here](#).
- **Amplify Stories on Social Media:** We urge you to help amplify the stories of the fasters on social media. [Use this toolkit](#) which will be updated throughout the week.
- **Hear Updates:** On Thursday, July 1st at 1pm ET (10am PT), there will be a movement-wide call to hear reflections from the fasters, updates on what's happening in Congress, and learn where we go from here. [Register for the event here](#).

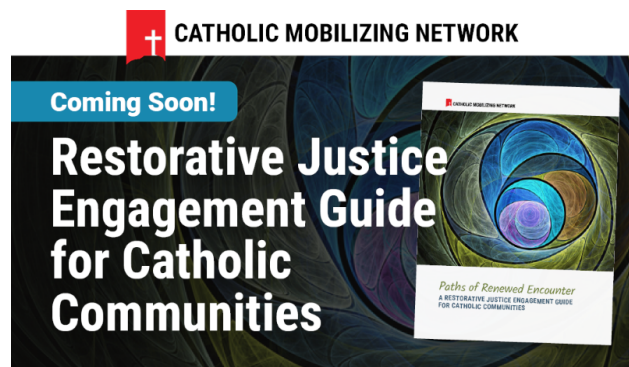
The coronavirus pandemic has demonstrated that many of our essential workers are undocumented immigrants who have risked their lives to provide basic services to their communities. They should not have to live in fear that they will be deported.

New Resource Guide on Restorative Justice

[Paths of Renewed Encounter: A Restorative Justice Engagement Guide for Catholic Communities](#) is a brand new resource from our friends at Catholic Mobilizing Network (CMN) which explores the foundational concepts and practical considerations for restorative justice engagement in Catholic settings.

Launching digitally this month, this expansive [toolkit](#) features theological teachings, restorative justice basics, related resources and reflection questions, and next steps for discernment and engagement. [Sign up to be the first to receive digital access to the Engagement Guide](#).

Also from CMN, we urge you to [sign and share their petition to President Biden to dismantle the death penalty](#).



Registration Open for Pax Christi National Conference

Our good friends at Pax Christi USA have opened registration for their upcoming [virtual conference](#) on July 30 and 31. Please see below the note from Pax Christi.

Registration is now open for Pax Christi USA's first National Conference since 2016, taking place virtually via Zoom on Friday evening, July 30th and Saturday, July 31st, with two special pre-conference lead-in events (one on



Thursday evening, July 29th and the other on Friday afternoon, July 30th).

[Click here to see full information about the 2021 national conference as well as a link to the registration form.](#)

We're incredibly excited to feature Olga Segura, author of [Birth of a Movement: Black Lives Matter and the Catholic Church](#), as our opening keynote speaker for the conference, as well as offering pre-conference, lead-in events from the Pax Christi Young Adult Caucus (Thursday evening, July 29) and the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative (Friday afternoon, July 30).

Conference: The Franciscan Way 2021 and Beyond

The [Sisters of St. Joseph of the Third Order of St. Francis](#) and the Sisters of Charity Foundation are sponsoring an interactive virtual conference **from July 23, 2021 to July 24, 2021**. The [Franciscan Way 2021 and Beyond](#) will explore the needs of the future, and identify what is emerging in the Franciscan Movement today.

The first night will be dedicated to the Keynote speaker, Athena Calogeras Godet, who is an educator, health care advocate, community motivator, writer and editor of Haversack, a Franciscan review. The second day will have a morning of panelists reflecting on the Franciscan charism and its emergence in our time. In the afternoon, attendees will have the opportunity to engage in small and large group discussions. [Click here for more info.](#)



The conference is being offered free of charge. [RSVP to attend by clicking here.](#)