

In our first reading this weekend, we hear how Jeremiah has been called to be a prophet by the Lord, who knew what mission He wanted Jeremiah to undertake even before he had been born.

Like him, all us of have a mission too. God put us here for a reason. The thing of it is, so often in life, we can think first and foremost about ourselves: what's in it for me. Or sometimes we think well if I do this for God, then God will in turn give me the good life. Now don't get me wrong, there's nothing wrong with having a good job, a nice house, and possessions. But these things don't come in exchange for praying and coming to Mass. Rather, while they may be part of our lives, our main thought as a Christian should be how can I use the gifts God has given me to build up this world? How can I come to know Him, and how can I help people come to know Him? A prophet is someone who knows how much God loves hem and all of humanity, and wants people to come to know this love. And sometimes, the job can be quite difficult. But what a huge impact it can have on so many people when we answer the call.

Green Bay, besides of course being the home of a certain football team, like my favorite team, that is not playing this weekend, is also known for

some deeply Catholic roots. In the area you'll also find a Marian shrine dedicated to the only approved Marian apparition that occurred in the United States. But what happened many years ago following that was the winning of so many souls for our Lord through the tireless efforts of a young woman who answered God's call to be a prophet: a 28 year old Belgian Catholic, an immigrant named Adele Brise.

Marie Adele Joseph Brise was born in 1831 to Lambert and Catherine Brise in Brabant, Belgium. At a young age, an accident blinded her in one eye, but this did not affect her character; she was regarded as a pious young girl who loved God, the Blessed Mother, and everyone she met. She attended a Catholic grade school of the Ursuline Sisters, where at the time of her First Communion, Adele, along with a few other girls, promised the Blessed Mother they would join a religious order of missionary sisters to teach children in foreign countries. By the 1850s, however, Adele's desire to join a religious order in Belgium seemed impossible since her family intended to emigrate. Her parish priest though told her to keep her hopes up, for maybe this would happen in America.

Lambert, Catherine, and their three children immigrated to the United States in 1855, and settled in the area of Red River, Wisconsin. This area was populated with Belgian immigrants served by missionary priests. In American Catholicism at that time, language barriers prevented many local churches from addressing pastoral needs. Ethnic churches were created to meet this challenge, but not in time to prevent the apathy of many immigrants regarding the practice of their faith. Hence the need then (and today) for evangelization.

Adele lived a simple life with her family in the years leading up to her encounter with Mary on October 9, 1859. On the first occasion of the Blessed Mother's apparition, she was walking to the grist mill with a sack of wheat when she encountered "a lady all in white standing between two trees, one a maple, the other a hemlock." Adele was frightened, because she did not know who the visitor was. Eventually the vision disappeared and she continued on her way. A few days later, Adele walked the same eleven-mile route to Mass at her local church in Bay Settlement. This time she was not alone, but was accompanied by her sister Isabelle and a neighbor woman. Adele again saw the lady. Much like the first time, the lady did not say a word, and the apparition quickly vanished, leaving Adele

distraught. As she had done a few years earlier in Belgium when she needed advice, she went to confession following Mass and asked the priest for counsel regarding the two encounters. Fr. Verhoef, the parish priest in the settlement, advised Adele that if it were a heavenly messenger, she would see the lady again, and this time she should ask, "In God's name, who are you and what do you want of me?"

Upon Fr. Verhoef's suggestion that the visitor might return, Adele armed herself with the two questions. On the way home from Mass, again with her two friends, she encountered the same "beautiful woman, clothed in dazzling white, with a yellow sash around her waist. Her dress fell to her feet in graceful folds. She had a crown of stars around her head, and her long, wavy, golden hair fell loosely over her shoulders. Kneeling, Adele opened her mouth, beginning a conversation with the Blessed Virgin Mary that would change her life forever.

"In God's name, who are you and what do you want of me?" asked Adele, as she had been directed.

"I am the Queen of Heaven, who prays for the conversion of sinners, and I wish you to do the same. You received Holy Communion this morning, and that is well. But you must do more. Make a general confession, and offer Communion for the conversion of sinners.

"What more can I do, dear Lady?" said Adele, weeping.

"Gather the children in this wild country and teach them what they should know for salvation."

"But how shall I teach them who know so little myself?" replied Adele.

"Teach them," replied her radiant visitor, "their catechism, how to bow to sign themselves with the sign of the Cross, and how bow to approach the sacraments; that is what I wish you to do. Go and fear nothing. I will help you."

Mary departed, lifting her hands as if giving a blessing. In a matter of minutes, Adele, a simple laywoman, uneducated but pious, received her

vocation: to teach young people the Catholic faith. Her education was meager, and she knew it. But now she knew her task.

Going forth from the apparition mystified, and having been sent as a missionary, Adele returned home to share her encounter and message with her parents, sisters, and everyone she met. Immediately following the apparition, Adele devoted her life selflessly to the cause of catechesis. Her early method of catechesis spanned the course of seven years, traveling distances of 50 miles from home through all elements of weather. Walking from village to village, knocking on doors, she offered to do housework for families in exchange for permission to teach their children the faith as Mary asked her to do.

Walking from home to home at great distances, it was very hard work. Impressed with her piety and willingness to follow her calling to great extremes, Fr. Phillip Crud, the newly appointed pastor to the Belgian colony, encouraged her to fulfill the mission given to her by the Blessed Virgin by forming a community of women who would share in this mission. With a letter of solicitation and commendation from her pastor, Adele set out with a companion to begin the first of many begging missions

throughout the settlement. Supported by others, Adele began a lay third order group of sisters, often called the Sisters of Good Health, but called the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi by Adele. Over the course of the years preceding her death, many young women joined the group of Sisters.

Taking no formal vows, they were free to leave whenever they wished. This tertiary group was officially recognized by the Diocese of Green Bay, and so they wore a religious habit and referred to one another as "Sister."

In the late 1860s, the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi were instrumental in founding St. Mary's Academy, distinguished as the second Catholic school in the diocese. It would grow to nearly 100 students by 1871. None of this was easy though. The Sisters taught in both French and English. Adele was responsible for religious formation of the students. Oftentimes these students were orphans and other children who were sent there to have a better life. The school's foundation was a testimony to the religious community's trust in Divine Providence. Accommodating more than a hundred children, the tuition was only a dollar a week. Adele wanted to make the education affordable and never turned anyone away for lack of funds. The dollar did not cover expenses, so the Sisters begged for money, food, and other necessities.

In addition to this hard work, there were two big events later in Sister Adele's life that are a testament to her determination and faith.

One was a huge fire, the Peshtigo Fire, that was the most devastating fire in the history of the United States. People in the Door Peninsula, particularly the area surrounding the Belgian settlement, were unaware of the happenings in Peshtigo. When the ferocious whirlwinds of explosive heat and flame overtook the territory, they, too, believed that the end of the world was upon them. The people of the area, staring death in the eye, took refuge at the Chapel of Our Lady of Good Help. When the fire threatened the area, people brought their families and farm animals to the grounds of the chapel.

During the night, the faithful, led by Sr. Adele, carried a statue of Mary around the perimeter of the grounds in prayer. By the morning, a downpour doused the flames. Outside the perimeter of the chapel grounds, everything was burned; yet the inside of the five-acre perimeter remained unscathed. To this day, many consider the event a miracle and the procession around the grounds has been repeated every year on Oct 9th.

As stressful as this event was, there were other threats to the people she was serving, namely spiritual.

Joseph Rene Vilatte, a baptized Catholic, left the Church and was ordained a priest by the Episcopal Church for the Old Catholic Church. He moved to the Belgian territory and began seeking to gain converts to his sect. The Old Catholic Church was formed in the late 1800s by persons who did not accept papal infallibility. As such, the Old Catholic Church denied the Immaculate Conception, confession, and indulgences; they also viewed clerical celibacy as optional and celebrated Mass differently.

Though he got people to leave Catholicism, Sister Adele and the Catholics were undeterred in their prophetic mission. The bishop brought in more priests to the area, and Sister Adele saw the fruits of evangelization.

Ultimately, the Old Catholic Church was unable to flourish in the Door Peninsula, By the end of his Vilatte had confessed his wrongdoing and remorse for having seduced approximately 500,000 Catholics and sought a return to the Catholic Church. He moved into a Catholic abby where he died as a layman.

Adele continued to live out her life of evangelization until her death on July 5, 1896. The school continued on for many more years, becoming a boarding academy, then a school for special needs children, then a high school, then a House of Prayer and then hosted Carmelite Sisters. Today it's a National Shrine of Our Lady of Good Help, the First and Only Church approved Marian Apparition Site in the United States.

Her life story is an incredible testament to the power we all have when we take our call to prophecy seriously. The key is to taking a page from her and remembering it's not about us, our egos, our desires, but about truly building up the kingdom of God. So how are we going to be tools to build up the Kingdom?

Jeremiah is told, like Adele, that he is a prophet. In this case to the nations. That's you and me too; we are a light to the nations. So a starting point is to open ourselves up to God. To listen, actively. To always be asking OK God, what do you want me to do next with my life? Or if we've found our vocation, to ask God what He wants us to do as a married person or mom

or dad. Listening can be hard. Sometimes we want to resist and do things our way. But when we listen to God, we will find true happiness.

As we do this though, we always have to remember it's not about us. If we think it is, or think well I do this then God will now do this for me or owes me this, we get to a bad spiritual spot. Remember what Jesus says: we take up our crosses and follow Him. This doesn't mean we seek out suffering for sufferings sake; or that we should feel bad if good fortunes come our way. But it does mean we don't want to fall into the trap of thinking we are owed a comfortable, easy life. The life of a prophet is not easy, and does not generally lead to material riches, or being the most popular of people. Rather, the prophet is spiritually rich. And this is what takes work - thinking big. Living in a life that seeks the deeper truth, seeing the potential in others for God's love to do so much for them, and seeing how they can change the world not by getting a bigger bank account or more popularity or power, but by helping people to come to know God.

This is why prophecy takes work, and can be unpopular. Sister Adele had to work tirelessly to grow her community; to raise funds; to trust that God would help her educate kids as she established a Catholic school; to even

deal with Church politics when a bishop heard a rumor she was giving alcohol to young people which was unfounded; and to deal with so much stress. But she was undeterred, and the results speak for themselves. So how about you and me? It's hard being a parent. It's hard being married at times. It's hard speaking the truth when it's so often counter-cultural. But when we do these things, what an impact we can have on our families and our world.

I love our second reading from Corinthians this week, a popular choice at weddings as it speaks to love, but what I love is how it speaks to the maturity of love. Paul says in that famous line "When I was a child I used to talk as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I put aside childish things. At present we see indistinctly as in a mirror, but then face to face. At present I know partially; then I shall know fully, as I am fully known." Such great words; because Paul is speaking of how we grow up. The question is, with all due respect to Jimmy Buffett (who wrote the song Growing Older but Not Up) have we grown up too. Because all of us have an image of who we want to be, we just can't see it or see the wrong image. Like George Bailey in it's a wonderful life who wants so much in the world, what he finds at the end, as his brother toasts him, is he is the

richest man in town. Why? Because like Sister Adele, he is spiritually rich. He has brought others closer to God through his sacrificial love. He's helped others to more see clearly in the mirror.

What a gift grace is. Sister Adele received an amazing gift one day going for a walk: a vision of our Lady. But she didn't keep her gifts for herself, rather she used them and changed the world. As our Blessed Mother said to her, you received communion and that is well, but you need to do more. That's what I see in so many people. People like our teachers who keep our school going and love the kids so much at Saint Joe's; in our catechists and faith formation volunteers who follow in the footsteps of Sister Adele; in parents who pass the faith on to their kids; in the many people who volunteer here at the parish; and in our dedicated staff. So what is God calling you to do? Being here today at Mass is part of it. But He's also calling you to do such more, to help the world see not through the glass darkly, but to clearly see how to get to heaven and to become the people God knows they can become. So let us take the grace God gives us, and give it to the world knowing that through us, God's love can do such amazing things as we, like Sister Adele, win souls for Jesus letting His amazing grace flow through us.