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Our Lady Queen of Peace

As we find ourselves in the beauty of another summer, there are a few activities that always come to mind. In fact, just last month I was involved in running a leadership camp for 50 high school seniors. As always, the favorite activity is water skiing. Who here knows how to water ski? Who here has any tips on water skiing? One more question: Has anyone here tried to get up—oh, I don't know, about 400 times, and still failed in front of 50 high schoolers? Thankfully, my masculinity is still in tact.

Water skiing is something else. I'd like to share a reflection on it from another source.

Here is a brief section from a book called "Undercurrents: A Life Beneath the Surface" by Martha Manning. This is what I found in her diary entry for September 10, 1990:

It's so hard to know when to hold on and when to let go. . . . I've never been good at letting go. I've always figured that if I held on hard enough and long enough, I would eventually prevail.

When I was seven, I watched enviously as the bigger kids took their turns water skiing. It looked so exciting, flying across the water, defying gravity with balance and speed. I pestered the big guys so long that they finally let me try it. I slid my feet into the skis. Even at the smallest adjustment, I could feel myself slipping on the web rubber, but I insisted that the fit was perfect. The boys walked me out into the freezing water, positioning me with my knees bent into my chest and my long skis facing up to the sky. It took the boat a while to circle back to the shore. They fooled with the towline, trying to get it untangled. I was shivering, but determined. They handed me the towrope and instructed me to hold on hard. I gripped the handle, and a boy yelled, "Hit it." The boat lurched forward.

Instantly, I flew out of the skis. But I kept holding on to the towrope. I trailed the speeding boat, ingesting salt water by the mouthful. I was totally disoriented, but thought I heard voices calling to me from the shore. I raised my head out of the water and could slowly decipher what they were yelling, "Martha, let go of the towrope. Let it go." It took several moments to register the meaning of what they were saying. Finally, I loosened my grip and watched the boat speed away with the towrope bobbing and dancing in its wake, just as I'd been doing seconds before. I rested in the water, allowing my life jacket to do all the work, cursing my small feet, and shaking with fear and cold.

I think of that image often these days: **the frigid water, the brief flight, my arms almost ripped from their sockets but still stubbornly holding on to that damn rope for dear life.** The same rope that was causing me such pain. Beyond strength, beyond safety, beyond good sense. I hear those voices in the distance, the voices I so rarely heed, yelling, "Let go, Martha. Just let go." I want to do as they say. But there's a part of me that fears now, just as I did then, that if I let go, I will surely drown."

- Martha Manning, *Undercurrents: A Life Beneath the Surface*, San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994, pp 103-4.

That image of holding on and letting go reminds me of what it means to live our simple lives as prophets. At the heart of the Christian life is a rhythm – it is the dance of holding on and letting go.

Perhaps when we think of prophets, we think of the Mount Rushmore prophets: Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King, Jr., Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, Rosa Parks, Desmond Tutu, Nelson Mandela, Ezekiel, and Jesus. If we are not we are not called to be a Mount Rushmore prophet, we are still called to be a prophet. Maybe in the galaxy of prophets those biggies I just mentioned are, in fact, stars, but taken together all of us provide phenomenal light—more light than anyone of them individually.

We delight in the work of Vatican II, but this is one of its main teachings: Together we are the light of the nations. They even named one of the four constitutions after us: *Lumen Gentium*. Yes, that call says that every last one of us is holy and our holiness is to illuminate the world with beauty and brightness—the kind that could outdazzle this past Tuesday’s fireworks on the Mall. And, very simply, this light is brought to us by our clear water of our baptism.

Like those Mount Rushmore prophets, we had these words spoken over us at our baptism:

“God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has freed you from sin, given you a new birth by water and the Holy Spirit, and welcomed you into his holy people. He now anoints you with the chrism of salvation. As Christ was anointed Priest, Prophet, and King, so may you also live always as a member of his body, sharing everlasting life.”

--from the Rite of Baptism

I think it is significant that we are appointed prophets at our baptisms, when we have zero qualifications other than the simple life that God gave us. We have no education, no wit, no eloquence, not even energy for the task. Yet, God has enough confidence in us that we somehow, somehow our lives can speak for God.

Imagine the prophetic light we throw off when
--we tell the truth
--let go of resentment and choose reconciliation
--cut some slack to someone in our office
--go deeper in a relationship rather than going out the door
--celebrate our sexuality with honesty and respect
--we choose good talk over gossip
--work for justice and care for the poor

These prophetic gestures belong to us because this is where we live and how we live. Simple prophets. Bright lights in this big city and even bigger Church. Lighting up this Kingdom of God.

In addition to the baptism that calls all of us to be prophets, we share one more thing with those Mount Rushmore, stars of prophets. We are called to join the delicate dance of holding on and letting go. Holding on to what is essential and foundational; letting go of what is not. And maybe sometimes, even letting go of what is essential and foundational so that we experience the great love of having God hold onto us. Because God never lets go of us.

My fellow prophets, let's light up the world.