

## **Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B**

**Celebration Summary by Glenn CJ Byer, MA SLD:** If the Scriptures proclaimed on the Sundays between Christmas and Lent focus more on the call to follow Jesus and to be his disciples, the period after Easter could be characterized as the season of the mission. Amos does not claim any special talent as a prophet, but rather is preaching at the house of God only because God sent him. Paul hammers this point home, speaking of destiny and choosing and salvation. The Gospel brings this word of mission to the time of Christ, when he sends out the twelve to do his work.

The call to be a follower of Jesus, then, is not just about doing good things. If we are called to follow, we are at the same time called to lead, to be on the mission of proclaiming the good news to the entire world. The urgency of having received and responded to the good news is that we know the benefits of salvation and we, like God want none to be lost. We want all to be saved and so we are to work tirelessly to ensure that all who are not part of the family of the Church will become followers of Jesus. This is our responsibility for we are members of Christ.

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### **First Reading** Amos 7:12-15

*Go, prophesy to my people.*

### **A reading from the Book of the Prophet Amos**

Amaziah, priest of Bethel, said to Amos,  
"Off with you, visionary, flee to the land of Judah!  
There earn your bread by prophesying,  
but never again prophesy in Bethel;  
for it is the king's sanctuary and a royal temple."  
Amos answered Amaziah, "I was no prophet,  
nor have I belonged to a company of prophets;  
I was a shepherd and a dresser of sycamores.  
The LORD took me from following the flock, and said to me,  
Go, prophesy to my people Israel."

### **The word of the Lord**

**Amos 7:12-15 Commentary by Tom Conry:** This episode, inserted in the middle of five remarkable visions, gives us some tantalizing biographical clues about the prophet Amos, who describes himself as "neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet." Of course, the fact that we are prefacing Amos' denials with the words "a reading from the prophet Amos" sets up some interesting cognitive dissonance on our part! How should this be understood? By the time of Amos (first half of the 8th century BCE), there were probably no independent prophets in the way that we usually think of them. Rather, what existed were prophetic guilds, funded by the royal establishment, and rolled out when popular support was felt to be flagging. Their job was to work for the royal family and prophecy on their behalf. Amos, who has already identified himself as a shepherd (1:1), tells Amaziah, priest of the royal establishment, that he understands himself as a cattleman and someone who tended sycamore trees - sycamore figs being commonly used as food for both the poor and livestock. Amaziah is deporting Amos for breaking with the guild prophets, the professional and respectable hangers on who had attached themselves to the royal treasury. Then as now, Amos' dual message of radical solidarity with the poor and the threat of justice to the mighty was not well received.

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## **Second Reading** Ephesians 1:3-14

*God chose us in Christ, before the foundation of the world.*

### **A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Ephesians**

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
who has blessed us in Christ  
with every spiritual blessing in the heavens,  
as he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world,  
to be holy and without blemish before him.  
In love he destined us for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ,  
in accord with the favor of his will,  
for the praise of the glory of his grace  
that he granted us in the beloved.  
In him we have redemption by his blood,  
the forgiveness of transgressions,  
in accord with the riches of his grace that he lavished upon us.  
In all wisdom and insight, he has made known to us  
the mystery of his will in accord with his favor

that he set forth in him as a plan for the fullness of times,  
to sum up all things in Christ, in heaven and on earth.

In him we were also chosen,  
destined in accord with the purpose of the One  
who accomplishes all things according to the intention of his will,  
so that we might exist for the praise of his glory,  
we who first hoped in Christ.

In him you also, who have heard the word of truth,  
the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him,  
were sealed with the promised holy Spirit,  
which is the first installment of our inheritance  
toward redemption as God's possession, to the praise of his glory.

## **The word of the Lord**

### **Ephesians 1:3-14 Commentary by Deacon Owen Cummings:**

What an abundantly rich passage! There are so many fertile theological ideas in it. Let's pick up briefly on five key themes. First, "God chose us in Christ before the world began." Christ, the Wisdom of God, is the One through whom all creation has come to be. Creation bears the impress of Christ, we are chosen in him. Creation, then, is in part God's very self-expression in Christ. Second, God's plan (or "mystery") is "to bring all things... into one under Christ's headship." Perhaps we might say that the Christ-impress, present from the first moment of creation, is to grow-in-grace until all creation reaches its final point of flourishing in Christ at the Parousia. Third, as central to this plan, we are "sealed with the Holy Spirit." "Seal" denotes ownership. Our identity is found only in God, through the Spirit. We are God's, not as an after thought, but "before the world began." Finally, this "sealing" with the Holy Spirit is the "first payment," the final installment is yet to come at the Parousia. Paul looks back to the beginning in Christ, and forward to the consummation in Christ. Creation, through the Spirit, is signed, sealed and will be delivered in Christ. The passage, indeed the entire letter to the Ephesians, invites us to become what theologian, David F. Ford, calls "a singing self." The lyrical text almost compels us to sing God's praises for what has happened, is happening, and will happen.

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## **Gospel Mark 6:7-13**

*He began to send them out.*

### **A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark**

Jesus summoned the Twelve and began to send them out two by two  
and gave them authority over unclean spirits.

He instructed them to take nothing for the journey

but a walking stick—

no food, no sack, no money in their belts.

They were, however, to wear sandals

but not a second tunic.

He said to them,

"Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave.

Whatever place does not welcome you or listen to you,

leave there and shake the dust off your feet

in testimony against them."

So they went off and preached repentance.

The Twelve drove out many demons,

and they anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

### **The Gospel of the Lord**

#### **Mark 6:7-13 Commentary by Fr. Damien Dougherty, O.F.M.:**

Jesus sends them out two by two according to the Jewish custom practiced likewise by John the Baptist and the primitive Church. The practical advantage was the mutual assistance and the possibility of reinforcing the witness that they were to give to their Master (Deut. 19, 15).

Jesus specifies that their traveling clothes must be reduced to the indispensable as they had to rely on hospitality in the places where they visited. In return for the spiritual good that he accomplished, the disciple had almost a right to be compensated with the necessities of life. Above all, however, with his example of detachment he demonstrates his confidence in God and simply welcomes the extended hospitality without seeking out new accommodations better than the first offer.

The testimony given by shaking the dust of their feet was done by each Jew upon re-entry from a pagan land, as if to leave behind every legal impurity contracted through contact with the Gentiles. By performing such a gesture towards the hostile and incredulous Jews themselves, the Apostles would have offered them a reason for reflection as well as a recall to repentance.

The Twelve immediately set out with this mandate which is a summary of Jesus' own preaching on the necessity of conversion. The anointing with oil was, merely, an external sign of the healing brought about through faith and prayer, in virtue of the power granted to the Apostles by Christ, an anticipation of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick (James 5, 14-15).

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