



Welcome to our Eucharistic Celebration

The Fifteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time

July 15, 2018

St. Mary of the Assumption Parish

Today's Themes in Scripture

Today's readings share a similar theme: God chooses whomever he wishes to accomplish his will. Since God is God, he is able to make any choice that suits him. What is often a surprise is *whom* he chooses. We might expect that God would choose the best and the brightest to accomplish his will, but that is not often the case.

Amos was a shepherd called by God to deliver some stern warnings to the enemies of Israel. The warnings Amos gives to Israel are even worse. Amos must tell the people of Israel that there will be terrible consequences for their faithlessness, immorality, and abandonment of God's Law. A simple shepherd with neither authority nor credentials hardly seems like the best choice, but Amos is God's choice. In today's reading, his preaching gets him banned from the temple in Bethel. Still, Amos persisted in his preaching. He did what God asked of him, even though he knew how ill-prepared he was for the task.

In the Gospel, Jesus sends out the twelve disciples on a mission to preach repentance and heal the sick. These are simple men, not great orators or members of the priestly class. They still don't fully understand who Jesus is or why he has come. Are they the right choice? They had just witnessed Jesus being rejected in his own hometown. If people do not listen to Jesus, will people repent and turn their lives around after hearing fishermen and tax collectors preach?

St. Paul makes some pretty astounding statements: that God has *chosen us* before the beginning of the world, that we were destined for adoption into his family, and that he has forgiven and redeemed us so we will be made holy and perfect for his glory. He also says that God reveals the mystery of his will to us so that we can serve his plan to unite all creation in Jesus. Paul himself was an odd person for God to call: Paul was a Pharisee, steeped in the Law. He defended the Law by persecuting the followers of Jesus yet Jesus himself called Paul to bring his Gospel of salvation to the Gentiles.

We hear a lot these days about the New Evangelization. Many of us wonder: *who* is supposed to do that? We might think that such a mission is meant for someone better suited or educated, someone with the right skill set. God, however, doesn't think like we do. He has a tendency to ask ordinary, even sinful people to carry out his will. Right now, the Holy Spirit is setting hearts on fire, asking ordinary people to share the good news again with those inside and outside the Church. Those who say yes to God will be given all the grace they'll need to do God's will.

Sunday Readings and Backgrounds

Reading I: Amos 7:12-15

The Lord has called and sent me.

- The prophet Amos preached at a time when God's people were divided into two kingdoms, Judah in the south and Israel in the north.
- God calls Amos to give the northern kingdom of Israel an unpleasant message.
- When Amos's message is not welcome, he points out that the choice to become a prophet was not his own.

Responsorial Psalm: Ps. 85: 9-10, 11-12, 13-14
Lord, let us see your kindness.

Reading II: Ephesians 1:3-14

We have been chosen in Christ.

- The letter to the Ephesians begins with a great hymn of praise.
- All people have been chosen by God in Christ, even before creation.
- Christians are redeemed by Christ and sealed with the Holy Spirit.

Gospel: Mark 6:7-13

He sent them out to preach and teach, giving them power to do so.

- In the Gospel story from Mark, Jesus sends the disciples out to do his work.
- Today's passage immediately follows the story of Jesus' rejection in Nazareth.
- If Jesus is rejected, the disciples continuing his work should also expect rejection.

Reprinted with permission. LifelongCatechesis.OSV.org.



Nothing in our Hands

Our liturgy of the word begins with the Prophet Amos. As the priest in charge is evicting him from the kingdom for being a prophet of doom, Amos protests that he never had any intention of becoming a prophet. Make his living on soothsaying? Hardly! He was more than content to mind his own flocks and orchards far from any idea of speaking out against injustice or calling for his people's conversion.

That was before God broke in on his life and set him on fire to denounce the injustice rampant in the land. Once on a roll, Amos preached with the best of them, accusing the powerful of placing less value on the poor than on sandals and comparing wealthy women to pampered cows. (Think of how the priest's wife must have reacted!) It is little surprise that the temple elite wanted to be rid of him.

Amos is just one of many prophets who must have looked to God and asked "Why me?" But even if he couldn't answer the question, he was still on fire with God's passion.

We don't necessarily think of Jesus' apostles as having that sort of fire — at least not during Jesus' lifetime. But a close look at today's Gospel might change our minds. The group had just been with Jesus as he was rejected in Nazareth and they stuck with him as he continued to preach in other places. Then, while they were on the road, he called them together to make them his emissaries.

He didn't ordain them, hand them a catechism or even give them a supply of newsprint and markers. He did give them power over evil spirits. What kind of comfort was that? Perhaps it was an insurance policy, but if so, one of the clauses clearly indicated that they were going to be fighting the devil and his minions!

The twelve went out with nothing more than a companion, the clothes on their backs and the fire in their hearts. Mark tells us that they preached "repentance," that's the metanoia message that invites people to believe in God's alternative to the reality they see around them. It's the message that had caught them in Jesus' net in the first place and the only thing they had to offer the people they were going out to meet. It was that message that chased away the demons and their conviction that nothing can change.

The healings the apostles performed, like those Jesus worked, were signs of that different reality, signs of what the kingdom of God is like and proof that it is possible.

The stories of Amos and the twelve whom Jesus sent out are stories of people who were captivated — Jeremiah would say seduced. They were people who allowed themselves to be chosen and changed into more than they ever thought they could be. For that to happen, they had to be willing to leave their sycamores, sheep and seashore. They had to allow their hearts to be vulnerable to the touch of God who offers endless possibilities.

The message of this week's readings follows last week's invitation to accept the scandal of the Incarnation. Today's selection from the Letter to the Ephesians is one long prayer of thanks to God for having chosen us to participate in Christ's life and the hope he brings. That fits between the stories of Amos and the apostles as a reminder that we share their call. The hardest mystery to believe may be, as Paul says, that God "chose us in Christ to be holy."

On this Sunday, as we listen to these readings we can let them simply be another instance of hearing, "The Word of the Lord," and responding with our rote, "Thanks be to God." On the other hand, we could take some real Sabbath time to consider the experiences they are telling us about.

Beginning with Paul's reminder that we have been chosen since "before the foundation of the world," we might consider what it means to be blessed in Christ. Ask yourself, "How different would my life be if I didn't know about or believe in Christ?" Ask too, "When have I gotten caught in the net of Christ and the vision he offers?"

Finally, following the lead of Psalm 85, invite God to speak to the hearts of your faith community and the entire church by praying, "Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation." This is the sort of prayer Jesus promised that two or three would never pray in vain. It may well be the sort of prayer that changed Amos from farmer to prophet and sent the apostles out to share their fire with anyone who would listen.

Written by Sr. Mary McGlone. Reprinted with permission. Celebration Publications. July 2018.