15th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Cycle B, 7.15.18
Amos 7:12-15/Ephesians 1:3-14/Mark 6:7-13

LET ME SHOW YOU THE DOOR. NOW LEAVE... IN PEACE

They’re present in every public building and they’re put there, as required by law, for our safety. We understand that. However, in churches I find them annoying. I mean, the “EXIT” signs above all the doors.

Amid all the symbols and sacramentals that are part of our faith tradition – candles and crosses, statues and tabernacle, altar and icon – the functional electric “EXIT” sign just seems out of place. Today, however, I think that our scripture readings and their message make sacred those annoying green and red lights and prove them to be essential to our vocation as Christians.

The fullness of our faith doesn’t flower until we leave this place of worship. It’s not until we get out of this space and into the streets, back to our homes, back on the baseball field, at our office desk or in the kitchen and around the dining room table that the grace of this sacramental encounter with Christ and his God, comes to fruition. St. Augustine, way back in the fourth century, said it often and beautifully:

You are the Body of Christ. In you and through you the world of the Incarnation must go forward. You are to be taken. You are to be blessed, broken and distributed, that you may be a means of grace and vehicles of eternal love.

Augustine encouraged his fellow Christians with these words: Behold what you are; become what you receive. If, therefore, you are the Body of Christ and His members, your mystery is present at the table of the Lord; you receive your mystery. To that which you are, you answer: “Amen;” and by answering, you subscribe to it. For you hear: “The Body of Christ!” and you answer “Amen!” Be a member of Christ’s Body so that your “Amen” may be the truth.

Through Baptism and in the Eucharist we find our truest identity as children of God and members of the household of the Church. It’s not a job, but our “vocation.” When Jesus called the Twelve, each already had his own means of livelihood. But at Jesus’ invitation, each was willing to set aside his job and share in Jesus’ vocation. His instructions to them were simple; preach repentance, heal people and continue Jesus’ battle with the powers of evil. So, what has Jesus called you to do and to be?

Like the Twelve, we are to be his emissaries. This won’t require us to travel to foreign lands, even though many have. (Although, if you’re the parents of teenagers, you actually are in foreign territory and trying to learn a new language). But what will be necessary is a shift in our way of thinking. What if we were to regard our job as our vocation, as an activity where I’m called by God to witness to truth, justice and goodness?
If you’re retired, what if you looked upon your time which is no longer bound by a rigid schedule or work routine as an opportunity to pray for others, to do good through a phone call or a visit, an email or a few hours volunteering at a school, a soup kitchen or juvenile home? If you’re working, what if you were to treat your co-workers as gifts from God?

How might the work I do become better, more careful, more generous? Maybe the drudgery of the workaday routine would turn into peace and serenity. No matter what the job, by God’s grace, it can become a vocation.

So what is it that prevents us from experiencing this transformation from just having a job to experiencing life as a “vocation” – a call from God? To move from merely making it through the day to be God’s “James Bond” if you will – an agent on a mission, called to a specific task, the way that Cardinal John Henry Newman came to trust in God and in God’s will for him when he wrote in a meditation:

> God has created me to do Him some definite service; He has committed some work to me which he has not committed to another. I have my mission. I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. God has not created me for naught. I shall do good, I shall do His work. I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place, while not intending it, if I do but keep the commandments. Therefore, I will trust Him. Whatever, wherever I am, I can never be thrown away. If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him; in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him; if I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him. ... God does nothing in vain”

The prophet Amos felt the same feelings of inadequacy that we often do. We see him standing up to Amaziah, the high priest in the king’s temple. Amos was denouncing the sins of the people, including the king’s. He recognized the boldness of his message. He also realized that it wasn’t his message. He was speaking for God and needed to trust that God was with him.

There is a story told about the great violinist Paganini, who came on stage for a performance and discovered, just as the audience ended their welcome applause, that there was something wrong with his violin. He looked at it and realized that it was not his famous and valuable violin. He felt paralyzed for a moment, then turned to his audience to explain and excused himself while he went backstage to retrieve his instrument. He stepped behind the curtain thinking it was where he had left it, only to discover that someone had stolen it and substituted the old second-hand violin he was holding in its place.

He stood there bewildered for a moment, then came out again before his audience and said: Ladies and gentlemen, I will show you that the music is not in the instrument but in the soul. And he played that night as he had never played before; out of that second-hand instrument, the music poured forth until the audience was enraptured with enthusiasm and the applause nearly lifted the roof because the
artist had revealed to them that the music was not in the machine but in his own soul.

The Word of God this weekend invites us to stir up again our minds and hearts our desire to be instruments of God’s grace and healing for others in this world. That’s the mantle that was thrust upon us at our baptism. That’s the mandate we were given when we were confirmed. That’s the pledge we renew each time we share the Eucharist. We don’t always feel adequate for the task. Certainly, the prophet Amos didn’t. He complained, when his job as a prophet got him in hot water with the competing prophets, that he never wanted this task.

“I was a shepherd; I watered the sycamore trees in the garden. I never asked the Lord for this. But God said to him, “Go, prophesy to my people Israel.”

So, at the end of Mass, when I show you the door, don’t take it as a dismissal, but as an invitation to make the message of the gospel real for our world. Don’t let our worship end with the last notes of the closing hymn, but let it be the beginning of a week that puts you on the road, announcing God’s Kingdom in as many ways as there are worshippers under this Pavilion. Take to heart the words of the dismissal rite:

Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life!

John Kasper, OSFS

It’s your mission and mine to walk out onto the stage of this world and reveal to hurting and hungry people that the music is not in conditions, not in things, not in externals -- but the music of life, of God’s grand and glorious plan for this world, is in your own soul. “Take nothing with you for the journey,” Jesus tells his followers. “All you need is right here in your heart. Don’t let rejection or troubles dissuade you. Carry out your task wherever you find yourself, in whatever circumstances. My grace is enough for you.”