

Homily 15th Sunday Ord year B 2021

Called and Sent on Mission (Vocation and Mission)

Amos, the first of the great prophets, lived in the eighth century before Christ. This was a time of peace and prosperity in the northern kingdom of Israel but a time of wholesale corruption and exploitation of the poor. In the first reading, Amos is forced to defend his vocation as a prophet to Israel.

Amos, who came from a poor village in the southern kingdom of Judah, courageously denounced the injustices inflicted upon the poor and drew on himself the anger of Amaziah, one of the leading members of the priestly caste. Amaziah lived in the wealthy Royal Sanctuary of Bethel and was a lackey of King Jeroboam II. It was not in his interest to have the unjust practices of the political establishment questioned by Amos. So, he orders Amos to go back to his own land (Judah) and prophesy there. In his reply Amos defends his prophetic vocation as a direct call from the Lord, not an inherited position with status, like that of Amaziah and the priestly caste to which he belonged. He was poor farmer, taking care of sycamore trees, before the Lord summoned him to go and prophesy to the people of Israel. This is the call he must obey. The example of Amos reminds us of our prophetic vocation as members of Christ's Body to speak truth to power, to point out and denounce the corrupt practices of powerful elites, and to defend the rights of the poor and exploited people of our time.

Today's gospel passage from Mark continues where last Sunday's left off. Following his rejection in his home town of Nazareth, Jesus summons twelve of his disciples and sends them out on mission, into the villages and towns where he himself had already preached. He shares his mission and authority with them – the same authority he received from his Father to cast out evil spirits, to heal and call to repentance. Jesus sends them out with detailed instructions, not about what they are to preach –but rather on how they are to live. They are not to travel on their own, but two by two. They are not to take anything for the journey except a staff: **'no bread, no haversack, no coppers for their purses'; not even 'a spare tunic'** (Mark 6:9). In other words, their lifestyle is to be marked by a radical dependence on God and on the generosity of the people to whom they minister. Finally, the locus of their ministry is to be people's homes rather than the synagogues.

Mark's account of the first apostolic mission may not, at first sight, seem very relevant to the complex challenges facing the Church in the twenty-first century. Yet it identifies the essential calling of the Church and all its members. Like the apostles who are its foundation stone, the Church is called to be a community of missionaries, continuing the mission of Jesus Christ in the service of God's reign. Its authority and power reside not in itself, but in the word of the one who calls and sends it. It is challenged to travel light, putting its trust in divine providence rather than in material resources, and being open to receive as well as to give. It is required to confront the forces of evil and serve as the agent of God's healing power in a sick and broken world. Above all, it is enjoined to witness to God's power by a radical simplicity of life-style.

And so, being partakers in the mission of Christ through our baptism, I find the prayer of St. Francis spelling out how we can go about the mission of Christ in our daily lives:

“Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon;

Where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope;

Where there is darkness, light; and when there is sadness, joy.

“Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;

To be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love;

For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;

And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.”

Amen