

15<sup>th</sup> Sunday.09

Let us look at today's readings. The first one is from the Book of the prophet Amos. Amos lived in the 700s BC. At that time there were two Jewish kingdoms, one in the north of the present land of Israel called Israel, the other in the south called Judah. The religious center of the northern kingdom was Bethel, where a group of prophets lived and served the king and his court. Amos came from the southern kingdom but had gone to Bethel. But Amaziah, the leader of the prophets surrounding the king, told Amos to leave because he was accusing the king and his nation of infidelity to God and warning them of future defeat and punishment at the hands of God. So the situation is clear. Amos was bad news. He had to be removed. The prophets surrounding the king, on the other hand, had nice things to say to the king.

Today's second reading is from the beginning of Paul's Letter to the Ephesians. Scholars believe it was taken from a liturgy, perhaps a liturgy of baptism. It blesses God for his goodness in creating us, in adopting us in Jesus as his children, in redeeming us and forgiving us our sins, and in sealing us with the gift of the Holy Spirit, the first installment of our full redemption in the next life. This prayer also gives us the story behind Christian faith. It

teaches us that God created the whole world in order to become one with it in and through Jesus. Jesus is the very reason for the whole world's existence, as well as its final destination. Therefore, in the end, in the fullness of time, God will sum up everything in heaven and on earth in Christ.

Then in today's Gospel we see Jesus sending out the disciples with authority to cast out unclean spirits. He also has instructions for their preparation for their journey. They are not to take any money or food or change of clothes with them, and if a household welcomes them, they are to stay there and not move to another. If people will not accept them, they are to leave there, even shaking the dust off their feet as a testimony against them. We are also told that they succeeded in their mission. They preached repentance, drove out demons, and when they anointed the sick with oil they were cured.

What can we take from these readings for our own lives? As is often the case, the first reading and gospel seem to be on the same page while the second reading stands alone. Their theme is prophecy. A prophet is one sent to preach God's word. God sends Amos. Since we recognize Jesus as God, his disciples whom he sends out can also be called prophets. But does that theme pertain

to us? Are we sent? Are we prophets? I think that answer has to be yes. In and through our baptism we became sharers in Jesus' role as priest, prophet and king. Concretely, I suppose we can say that we are sent by the Lord to preach by living good lives. If we do lead good lives, our lives say something to anyone who cares to look at them. They preach. That basic kind of prophecy we must all practice. We must lead good lives. We must preach the love of God and neighbor by the way we live. If we fail there, we fail in our Christian identity. We fail to be prophets.

But some of us take prophecy to a different level. Such people try to live good lives, and in that way we and they are one. But they see the living of a good life as embracing more than we see, and in this way they part company from us. And here things become difficult and often lead to divisions within our family of the Church. Examples of this would be people who believe that taking part in war in any form is contrary to Christian living. Most of us don't agree with this kind of prophetic living. But look at the people who have believed that. They are the biggest names in twentieth century Catholicism in our country. Both Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton refused to participate personally (Merton) or even support (Day) our nation's participation in WWII. Recall Fr. Daniel Berrigan's refusal to support our fighting the Viet Nam

war. But some of us, while supporting his goal, did not embrace the means he used to reach it. He and his supporters broke into US army property and poured human blood on warheads.

Perhaps some would say that our stance as a church against abortion is prophetic. If one of the criteria to be used in judging an action as authentically prophetic is the amount of hatred it engenders, then it would seem that the right to life movement could be called prophetic, for it arouses great hatred in some people. But here again it may not be the goal of this movement but the means it has used to achieve this goal that make some people hate it so much.

How we interpret an action as prophetic depends ultimately on what we consider the demands to be which the leading of a good Christian life makes on us. And here the greater a person's vision is, the greater that person's responsibility, and the greater the need for prophetic action in his or her life. An example. Our nation under the Bush administration engaged in torture. Some of us would say that a Christian faith demanded that we speak out against this. Others among us did not see it so. But for those who saw this as criminal activity and as a corruption of the ideals of our country, there was no legitimate action except a prophetic one.

They had to raise their voices against such evil. Thank God, the situation is now behind us because of the change in administration. But the question remains as to what should be done to those who were responsible for it.

And so we are back to Amos and his dismissal from the court of the king. We are back to Jesus and his sending out of the disciples to preach repentance and to heal the sick. And we are back to blessing God who has created, adopted, redeemed and anointed us with the Holy Spirit in and through his son Jesus, our Lord. Amen.