

September 22nd, 2016, 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

Amos 8:4-7

Amos was a great champion of the poor—probably because he was poor himself, a shepherd before God chose him for prophecy.¹² He was the first of the prophets whose oracles were preserved in a book of the Bible. He lived in the eighth century before Christ, a time of prosperity but also a time of injustice and corruption. His message is very negative as it warns Israel (the northern kingdom) of impending doom because of their sins, especially those against social justice.¹ In this selection, the rich and powerful are eager for the holy days to end so they can engage in lucrative business practices.⁴

4Hear this, you who trample upon the needy and destroy the poor of the land!

5“When will the new moon be over,” you ask, “that we may sell our grain, and the sabbath, that we may display the wheat? The first day of the new moon was celebrated as a day of rest, much like the Sabbath, when no business could be conducted. Amos depicts the greed of the wealthy who can't wait for such days to be over so that they can get back to making money by dishonest business practices.¹ **We will diminish the ephah,** The ephah was slightly larger than a bushel and they plan to use a measure smaller than it should be to give less product to the buyer.¹ **add to the shekel,** The shekel was a unit of weight and they plan to use one that is heavier than it should be which will tip the scales in their favor.¹ **and fix our scales for cheating!** They also plan to tamper with their scales so that they will cheat their customers.¹

6We will buy the lowly for silver, and the poor for a pair of sandals; When landowners fell on hard times they sold themselves as well as the land and greedy merchants took advantage and paid a small sum. **even the refuse of the wheat we will sell!** They even plan to sell the chaff of the wheat, probably mixing it in with the grain itself.¹

7The Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob: The “pride of Jacob” is Yahweh. Jacob stands for the people of Israel.⁴ **Never will I forget a thing they have done!** This is an ominous promise for the wealthy and a consoling one to the poor.¹ **BUSINESS FRAUD IS A SIN AGAINST THE 7TH COMMANDMENT** as is the deliberate retention of goods lent or of objects lost, paying unjust wages, and forcing up prices by taking advantage of the ignorance or hardship of another.² (CCC 2409)

1 Timothy 2:1-8

This first half of the chapter concerns intercessory prayer for ecclesiastical and government leaders. Timothy's task is to reorder public worship in Ephesus according to Paul's directives.¹⁵ It is interesting to note that Ephesus was one of the seven churches in Asia that was given a warning in Revelation: “Remember then from what you have fallen, repent and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.” (2:5) Not one of the seven churches in Asia is left today. Since the late Middle Ages, that whole area has been under Muslim rulers, who conquered it in a long series of bloody wars that left most of the cities desolate. In the 1920's, the last of the Greek Christians were expelled from Turkey, except for a small pocket in Constantinople, and since then all the seven churches mentioned in Revelation have been extinct.¹⁴

Beloved:

1First of all, I ask that supplications, prayers, petitions and thanksgivings St. Augustine uses this text to explain the various parts of the Mass: “We take as ‘supplications’ those prayers which are said in celebrating the Mysteries before beginning to bless the bread and wine that lie on the table of the Lord. (Probably the ‘Prayers of the Faithful.’) We understand ‘prayers’ as meaning those prayers that are said when the offering is blessed, consecrated and broken for distribution and the

Church closes this prayer with the Lord's prayer. 'Intercessions' are made when the blessing is being laid on the people and when the rite is completed and all have received this great Sacrament, the whole ceremony is brought to an end by 'thanksgiving.'⁵ A man who thanks God becomes aware of God's gift. He admires it, he rejoices at it, and it becomes the nourishment of his thought and his life.¹⁰ **be offered for everyone**, Not just themselves! The Church helps people keep this command by the Prayers of the Faithful as well as when we pray at mass "for Holy Church, for those in authority, for those oppressed by various needs, for all mankind, and for the salvation of the entire world."⁵

2for kings and for all in authority, Nero was the emperor at this time and it was under this wicked man that Paul was imprisoned and he knew that soon he was to be beheaded. This proves to us that we must pray for bad rulers as well as good rulers.³ **that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all devotion and dignity**. One reason for praying for those in authority was to show that the Christians were not subversive.¹ Prayer for civic officials is a continuation of the Jewish custom to offer prayers and sacrifices for secular rulers.¹⁴

3This is good and pleasing to God our savior,

4who will everyone to be saved This prayer for authorities seeks their conversion.¹ There is no soul that does not matter to Christ. Paul has just said that we should pray for all men and now he tells us why: *God wants all men to be saved*. **and to come to knowledge of the truth**. Knowledge of Christian truth is a fundamental requirement for salvation and other letters written by Paul clearly show that a program of Christian conduct and good works is also necessary.⁴

5For there is one God. There is also one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, Christ is in a position to represent all men because he shares human nature with them.⁴ Being true God and true man, Jesus has offered a sacrifice of infinite value (his life) to reconcile men to God.⁵ However, this does not prevent the Saints and angels and especially the Blessed Virgin Mary, who are already in heaven, from obtaining graces and helping to build up the Church's holiness. They are mediators by virtue of their union with Christ.⁵ The Saints contemplate God, praise him and constantly care for those whom they have left on earth. When they entered into the joy of their Master, they were "put in charge of many things." Their intercession is their most exalted service to God's plan. We can and should ask them to intercede for us and for the whole world.² (CCC 2683)

6who gave himself as ransom for all. A ransom is the price paid for the release of captives. In the Old Testament, Family members took responsibility for paying the ransom price for other family members who were taken captive or sold into slavery. In the New Testament, God purchases his people from slavery in sin by the price of Christ's own life. His saving death thus ransomed us for freedom and fellowship in the family of God.¹⁵ **This was the testimony** Christ died for all men and thereby gave testimony to the will of the Father who desires that all men be saved.⁴ **at the proper time**. This is the time chosen by God for the salvation of mankind.⁴

7For this I was appointed preacher and apostle—I am speaking the truth, I am not lying—teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth. Paul was given the specific ministry of proclaiming God's offer of salvation to all the nations.¹ Note that he says that he was appointed *preacher, apostle and teacher*.

8It is my wish, then, that in every place the men should pray, lifting up holy hands, St. Thomas Aquinas wrote that what we do externally when we pray helps to move us internally. The raising of the hands signifies the lifting of the heart.⁵ Consider how effectively Moses prayed for the Israelites when they were in battle against the Amelikites. As long as he held his arms up, the Israelites prevailed. When he put them down, the Amelikites prevailed, so Hur and Aaron helped him hold his arms up and the Israelites won! (Ex. 17:12) **without anger or argument**. This reminds us that to pray effectively we should do so free of anger and dissention. Sin and strife can thwart the effectiveness of our prayers.¹³

Pope St. Clement of Rome provides the Church's most ancient prayer for political authorities: "Grant to them, Lord, health, peace, concord, and stability, so that they may exercise without offense the sovereignty that you have given them. Master, heavenly King of the ages, you give glory, honor, and power over the things of earth to the sons of men. Direct, Lord, their counsel, following what is pleasing and acceptable in your sight, so that by exercising with devotion and in peace and gentleness the power that you have given to them, they may find favor with you."² (CCC 1900)

Luke 16:1-13

The parable of the Unrighteous Steward is about urgency and preparedness (and resourcefulness). Christians should take even greater care than this steward to prepare for life in the world to come.⁶ Everything we have is a gift from God, and we are his stewards who sooner or later will have to render an account to him.¹¹ (Romans 14:12)

¹Jesus said to his disciples, "A rich man had a steward. This was a head servant who handled the business affairs of his master's estate.⁶ who was reported to him for squandering his property. The charge against him was not dishonesty, but wastefulness and mismanagement and in his preparations for the future he may not have been dishonest either. Stewards were often paid from the interest charged on loans. In the present case, the amounts he deducted from the individual debts may have been the exorbitant interest originally coming to him.⁹

²He summoned him and said, 'What is this I hear about you? Prepare a full account of your stewardship, The manager has to produce the books for audit. because you can no longer be my steward.'

³The steward said to himself, 'What shall I do, now that my master is taking the position of steward away from me? I am not strong enough to dig and I am ashamed to beg.

⁴I know what I shall do so that, when I am removed from the stewardship, they may welcome me into their homes.'

⁵He called in his master's debtors one by one. To the first he said, 'How much do you owe my master?'

⁶He replied, 'One hundred measures of olive oil.' This was about 800 gallons.⁶ He said to him, 'Here is your promissory note. Sit down and quickly write one for fifty.' We do not know whether his action deprives the master of further funds owed him or whether he was eliminating his own customary cut.⁷

⁷Then to another the steward said, 'And you, how much do you owe?' He replied, 'One hundred kors of wheat.' This was about 1000 bushels of wheat.⁶ The steward said to him, 'Here is your promissory note; write one for eighty.' The debt is reduced 20%.⁶

⁸And the master commended that dishonest steward for acting prudently. Jesus points to the steward as both an example and a warning. As an example he shows how to expend every effort in making use of our means to prepare for the future. Believers are challenged to make friends by almsgiving in order to be received into "eternal habitations." As a warning, the steward is intended to characterize the attitude of the Pharisees, who are charged with being "lovers of money." It is implied that they seek not eternal riches but the esteem of men and the temporal comforts of this world.⁶ For the children of this world are more prudent in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. The worldly wise are more clever with respect to their own crisis than are the Jews with regard to the crisis facing them, namely the visitation of God's prophet and its demands for repentance.⁷

9I tell you, make friends for yourselves with dishonest wealth. This translation is difficult but it means to use the money of this world for almsgiving which is an investment in the kingdom of God.⁶ so that when it fails, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings. God will receive you.

10The person who is trustworthy in very small matters is also trustworthy in great ones; and the person who is dishonest in very small matters is also dishonest in great ones. The implied contrast is between the small matters which is the use of money and the greater matters which is the response to God.⁷

11If, therefore, you are not trustworthy with dishonest wealth, This refers to the temporary and transitory things. who will trust you with true wealth? This refers to that which comes by gift from God.⁷

12If you are not trustworthy with what belongs to another, who will give you what is yours? “What belongs to another” refers to temporal things, which are essentially impermanent. “What is yours” refers to goods of the spirit, values which endure, which are things we really do possess because they will go with us into eternal life. In other words: how can we be given heaven if we have proved unfaithful, irresponsible, during our life on earth?¹¹

13No servant can serve two masters. There is always the danger of subordinating the spiritual to the material without realizing that a new master has taken over.⁹ He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and mammon.”

Mammon is the personification of property, not only money but any possession.⁸ It is seen as an idolatrous power that can compete with God for our allegiance.⁷ Christ does not condemn money which is necessary for life or is useful for distribution out of love. Only money which fosters selfishness to the detriment of justice and money which makes men forget God is what stands condemned. When material riches absorb all man’s attention, then man robs God of what is due to Him.¹⁰

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 1998” by Lawrence E. Mick, (2) “Catechism of the Catholic Church,” (3) “The Bread of Life Catholic Bible Study” by Deacon Ken & Marie Finn, (4) “The Jerome Biblical Commentary,” (5) “The Navarre Bible: Thessalonians And Pastoral Epistles,” (6) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Luke,” With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (7) “The Gospel of Luke” by Luke Timothy Johnson, (8) “Dictionary of the Bible” by John L. McKenzie, S.J., (9) “The Collegeville Bible Commentary: Luke” by Jerome Kodell, O.S.B. (10) “Saint Joseph Commentary On The Sunday Readings: Year C” by Achille DeGeest, O.F.M. (11) “The Navarre Bible: St. Luke” (12) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 2004” by Aelred R. Rosser, (13) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Letters of St. Paul to the Thessalonians, Timothy, and Titus” With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (14) “Understanding The Scriptures” by Scott Hahn and (15) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Mark” With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch.

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.