

September 29th, 2016, 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C

Amos 6:1a, 4-7

No prophet ever used stronger, bolder, sharper language than Amos. He had hard things to say, so he had to be a hard man to say them. Not everyone who is controversial and hated is a prophet, but every prophet is controversial and hated. He truly comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable.¹⁴

During the 40 year reign of King Jereboam II (786-746 B.C.) things went well in the North.¹⁷ The nation was at peace and all that the people thought of was pleasure and having a good time.¹⁵ Amos came from the South—from Judah—calling to their conscience. He gave them 3 warnings and today's reading is part of the third and final warning. This harsh prophecy is addressed to the leaders of the people who are complacent in their luxurious surroundings, unconcerned about what is happening to the nation, which is about to be destroyed by the Assyrians.²

1a Thus says the Lord the God of hosts: Woe to the complacent in Zion! “Woe” is always a lament.¹ While Amos speaks primarily to the northern kingdom, here he seems to include the southern kingdom--Zion--as well.⁴ Here follows a description of the self-indulgent lifestyle of these wealthy leaders.²

4 Lying upon beds of ivory, These beds were inlaid⁶ and very expensive. Ivory symbolizes great wealth and extravagance.¹⁵ stretched comfortably on their couches, they eat lambs taken from the flock, and calves (veal) from the stall! These animals upon which they feast are supposed to be set aside for sacrifice to the Lord so they are adding sacrilege to gluttony.¹

5 Improvising to the music of the harp, like David, There is irony here because David praised God and they sing in drunken revelry. they devise their own accompaniment.

6 They drink wine from bowls (larger than cups) and anoint themselves with the best oils; yet they are not made ill by the collapse of Joseph! The idle rich do not lament the imminent moral collapse of Joseph, they are even contributing to it.¹ Joseph refers to the northern kingdom.⁶ Their complacency is possible because they are insulated by their own wealth.² The tragedy of luxurious living is that it blinds a man and weighs down his heart.³ The most horrible state of all is a dead conscience.¹⁴

7 Therefore, now they shall be the first to go into exile, Those reveling in luxury and in elegant gluttony will be at the head of the exiles.⁴ The conquest by the Assyrians was the punishment for their sins, especially the neglect of the poor! and their wanton revelry shall be done away with.

The Catechism points out that it is by what they have done for the poor that Jesus Christ will recognize his chosen ones.⁵ We have cause for concern here in the U.S. as we spend billions of dollars on cosmetics, while millions of people are starving. We spend more on dog food in this country than many nations spend on their entire budget. We kill more unborn babies in one year than all of the military personnel who have died in battle since the country began.¹⁵

1 Timothy 6:11-16

Timothy was a young convert who came to the church through Paul's preaching. He was soon made bishop of the important city of Ephesus and Paul wrote this letter to him personally for encouragement and advice on how to administer this great responsibility.¹⁴

11 But you, man of God, This expression is often applied to Prophets. Paul wants Timothy to reawaken his awareness of being God's representative.³ pursue righteousness, “Righteousness” means giving both men and God their due.¹⁶ devotion, “Devotion” is the reverence of the man who never ceases to be aware that all life is lived in the presence of God.¹⁶ faith, “Faith” as it is used

here is the virtue of a man who, through all the chances and the changes of life, down even to the gates of death, is loyal to God.¹⁶ **love**, “Love” is the virtue of the man who cannot forget what God has done for him and cannot forget the love of the heart of God to men.¹⁶ **patience** The word translated as “patience” is actually victorious endurance. It is unswerving constancy to faith and piety in spite of adversity and suffering. It never means the spirit that sits with folded hands and simply bears things, letting the experiences of life flow like a tide over it!¹⁶ **and gentleness**. This word is difficult to translate. It describes the spirit which never blazes into anger for its own wrongs, but which can be purely and devastatingly angry for the wrongs of others. It describes the spirit which knows how to forgive, and yet knows how to wage the battle of righteousness. It describes the virtue by which a man at one and the same time remembers the shame of being a sinner and the glory of being a son of God. It is the virtue by which at all times a man is enabled rightly to treat his fellow men, and rightly to regard himself.¹⁶ These virtues are especially helpful in building up the Church.⁷

12Compete well for the faith. Lay hold of eternal life, to which you were called when you made the noble confession in the presence of many witnesses. This probably meant Timothy’s Baptism but it could also refer to his consecration as Bishop.³ The term “noble confession” is also used in the next verse. It seems that the testimony of Christ given through his cross becomes the testimony about Christ given as a statement of faith.¹⁵

13I charge you before God, who gives life to all things, and before Christ Jesus, who gave testimony under Pontius Pilate for the noble confession, Jesus spoke to Pontius Pilate, “The reason I was born, the reason why I came into the world, is to testify to the truth . Anyone committed to the Truth hears My voice.” Paul may also have had in mind Jesus’ martyrdom on the cross under Pilate.⁶

14to keep the commandment This refers to ALL the truths of the faith entrusted to Timothy.⁶ **without stain or reproach** These are code words for faithful, persevering and wholehearted service.⁷ **until the appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ** This refers to the visible manifestation of Christ at his Second Coming.

15that the blessed and only ruler There are four attributes which show the power and sublimity of God in this benediction and this is the first: Jesus is the only Sovereign or ruler from whom all lawful rulers on earth receive their authority. **will make manifest at the proper time,** This will be the time fixed by God for the Second Coming. **the King of kings and Lord of lords,** Second, Jesus is the King of those who reign and the Lord of those who wield lordship.

16who alone has immortality, This third quality of immortality is proper to God, who is Life. Angels and souls are immortal only by virtue of the nature given them by God. **who dwells in unapproachable light,** Finally, he is light and brightness which are attributed to God to show that God transcends all created things and cannot be fully comprehended by man.⁸ **and whom no human being has seen or can see.** St. Thomas explains that an object can be invisible either because it lacks brightness such as when things are dark, or because it is too bright as occurs in the case of the sun, which is so bright that the human eye cannot look at it. So it is with God who is so far beyond the capacity of the human mind that man cannot entirely take him in, even though what we can learn about him by the right use of reason and through revelation is true and accurate.⁸ **To him be honor and eternal power. Amen.** This hymn of praise is one of the richest and most beautiful in the New Testament and may have been taken from the Church’s liturgy. This hymn shows us that the first Christians were fully aware that man’s true purpose in life is to give glory to God.⁸

Luke 16:19-31

The story of the Rich Man and Lazarus depicts the lot of the wealthy and the poor, first in this life and then in the next. This could be called, "The Story Of The Man Who Never Noticed" for it speaks of the sin of neglect.¹⁸ This parable disposes of two errors — that of those who denied the survival of the soul after death and that of those who interpreted material prosperity in this life as a reward for a good moral life, and adversity as punishment.¹²

Jesus said to the Pharisees: This parable is addressed primarily to the Pharisees. In verse 14 it tells us that they were "money lovers." These men thought to find justification in their precise observance of the law.⁶

19 "There was a rich man His traditional name was "Dives," which is the Latin for rich.¹⁸ **who dressed in purple garments and fine linen** This was expensive apparel often associated with royalty.⁹ This could also be a description of the robes of the High Priests.¹⁸ **and dined sumptuously each day.** Not just on great feast days. In a country where the common people were fortunate if they ate meat once a week, Dives is a figure of indolent self-indulgence.¹⁸

20 And lying at his door was a poor man named Lazarus, Because every Jewish landowner was Yahweh's tenant, he owed "taxes" to Yahweh's representatives, the poor, and was thus expected to share the land with them in the form of alms.⁶ It was not his wealth that kept him from Abraham's bosom, but his untrustworthy stewardship.⁷ **covered with sores,**

21 who would gladly have eaten his fill of the scraps They had no napkins so the guests wiped their hands or plates on bread and threw it on the floor. Lazarus longed to have even that food. The rich man's sin was his blind indifference to the agony of the poor.⁶ **that fell from the rich man's table.** **Dogs even used to come and lick his sores.** Things associated with dogs were unclean so this is another sign of the man's outcast condition.¹¹

22 When the poor man died, he was carried away by angels This is the basis of the song we sing in the funeral liturgy: "May the angels lead you into paradise." This story teaches the innate dignity of every human person, independent of his social, financial, cultural or religious position.¹² **to the bosom of Abraham.** This referred to the intimate presence of Abraham, the forefather of Israel. It was a temporary realm within Hades where the righteous souls of the Old Covenant era waited patiently for Christ to open the gates of heaven.⁹ Here they experienced no pain of any sort, but supported by the blessed hope of redemption, they enjoyed peaceful repose. It was to liberate these holy souls that Christ descended into hell after the crucifixion and before the resurrection.¹² **The rich man also died and was buried.**

23 and from the netherworld, The netherworld was the place of the dead.

Jesus shows through this parable that there was a difference between Abraham's presence and the place where sinners languished in the grip of torment.⁵ (CCC 633) The two groups are separated by a permanent, unbridgeable gulf that permits no traffic to pass between them.⁹ **where he was in torment, he raised his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side.** Immediately after death we begin to enjoy our reward or to suffer the punishment of everlasting damnation. Since the Resurrection of Jesus, the souls of all who die in the grace of God enter heaven immediately after death or after first undergoing a purging, if that is necessary.⁵ (CCC 1022)

24 And he cried out, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me. John the Baptist had already indicated that it was not enough to claim "we have Abraham as our father" for they must "do the fruits required of repentance." (3:8) **Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am suffering torment in these flames.'**

25 Abraham replied, 'My child, remember that you received what was good during your lifetime while Lazarus likewise received what was bad; but now he is comforted here, whereas you are tormented.

26 Moreover, between us and you a great chasm is established to prevent anyone from crossing who might wish to go from our side to yours or from your side to ours.' After death the impious will not repent and enter the Kingdom, nor will the just sin and go down into hell. This is an unbridgeable abyss. Death puts an end to human life as the time open to either accepting or rejecting the divine grace manifested in Christ.⁵ (CCC 1021) Consider the pleadings of St. John Chrysostom: " I ask you and I beseech you and, falling at your feet, I beg you: as long as we enjoy the brief respite of life, let us repent, let us be converted, let us become better, so that we will not have to lament uselessly like that rich man when we die and tears can do us no good."¹²

27 He said, 'Then I beg you, father, send him to my father's house,

28 for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they too come to this place of torment.'

29 But Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets. The Old Testament scriptures give sufficient warnings.⁹ Let them listen to them.' Jesus is warning the Pharisees that lip service to the law and superficial correctness in observance do not really mean listening to the word of God.¹⁰

30 He said, 'Oh no, father Abraham, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'

The prayers of Dives were all too late for his own relief and unavailing for his brothers, who had, as he had had, the divine law to tell them what to do.¹⁹ Some suggest that the rich man is still being selfish, for he realizes that the damnation of his entire family would only increase his misery.⁹

31 Then Abraham said, 'If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone should rise from the dead.'" Not even miracles will benefit those indifferent to the Scriptures.⁹

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 2004" by Aelred R. Ross, (2) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 1998" by Lawrence E. Mick, (3) "Saint Joseph Commentary On The Sunday Readings: Year C" by Achille Degeest, O.F.M., (4) "Old Testament Reading Guide: Amos" by Neal Flanagan, O.S.M., (5) "Catechism of the Catholic Church," (6) "The Jerome Biblical Commentary," (7) "The Collegeville Bible Commentary: I Timothy" by Jerome H. Neyrey, S.J., (8) "The Navarre Bible: Thessalonians And Pastoral Epistles," (9) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Luke," (10) "The Collegeville Bible Commentary: Luke" by Jerome Kodell, O.S.B., (11) "The Gospel of Luke" by Luke Timothy Johnson, (12) "The Navarre Bible: St. Luke," (13) "The Bread of Life Catholic Bible Study" by Deacon Ken e³ Marie Finn, (14) "You Can Understand The Bible" by Peter Kreeft, (15) "workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 2007" by James L. Weaver, (16) "The Letters To Timothy, Titus And Philemon" by William Barclay, (17) "Dictionary of the Bible" by John L. McKenzie, S.J., (18) "The Gospel Of Luke" by William Barclay, and (19) "The Parables Of Christ" by Charles J. Callan, O.P.

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