

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B

Amos 7:12-15

This is the oldest of the prophetic books and it contains the discourses of Amos, who was a shepherd and a fruit gardener in Judah. God called him to prophesy to the people up north in Israel about 750 years before Christ. He was not a professional prophet and he only spoke in obedience to a divine vocation. When Amos prophesied the overthrow of the sanctuary, the fall of the royal house, and the captivity of the people, it was more than the leaders of Israel could bear. The chief priest of Bethel, Amaziah, who was a member of the official family and a spokesperson for the king, drove Amos from the shrine at Bethel. This all took place during a period of peace and prosperity, and Amos, a prophet of judgment whose tone was very threatening, was seen as an enemy rather than the one who exposed sin and tried to help save the people of the nation.¹

¹²Amaziah, priest of Bethel, Bethel is located about 14 miles north of Jerusalem. It was a place of assembly where Jeroboam I had set up a golden calf and installed priests who were not Levites (1 Kings 12:28-31) Amaziah was not a priest of Yahweh.¹³ said to Amos, “Off with you, visionary, This was a contemptuous name for “prophet”.¹³ flee to the land of Judah! Amaziah has just expelled Amos from Israel for speaking against the royal house!⁴ There earn your bread by prophesying, The priest strongly implied that Amos was a prophet for hire because he did not want to hear Amos reveal the truth.² He is essentially telling Amos to go home, that he is a foreigner here. Amos is a Judahite (Southern Kingdom) and Bethel is on the border but in the Northern Kingdom. Amos is interfering in Israel’s religious and political affairs.¹³

¹³but never again prophesy in Bethel, for it is the king’s sanctuary and a royal temple.” Judah had its temple in Jerusalem and Israel had the temple at Bethel, which was also the official sanctuary of the king.⁴

¹⁴Amos answered Amaziah, “I was no prophet, nor have I belonged to a company of prophets; Amos is making it clear that he was not connected to the professional prophets and he had no interest in being a prophet for the purpose of earning money nor does he keep company with evil people.² I was a shepherd and a dresser of sycamores. Amos was saying that he was just an ordinary man.² The sycamore tree bore insipid, tasteless fruit. It grew especially well in the lowlands of Palestine and was related to but smaller than the fig. It was the food of the poor. At a certain point in its development, the dresser had to puncture the fruit so that it would grow large enough to become edible. The occupation was seasonal.⁴

¹⁵The Lord took me from following the flock, God took him from his everyday life and told him to go and prophesy to the people of Israel.² and said to me, Go, prophesy to my people Israel.” Amos was a prophet, not by his own choice or study or through inheritance, but through the personal intervention of God.⁴ Amos shows us the incredible power that comes from being OBEDIENT to God’s will.²

While our selection ends here, we are told in verse 17 of the terrible prophecy of Amos who got the last word in to Amaziah when he told him that: “Your wife shall be made a harlot in the city, and your sons and daughters shall fall by the sword; your land shall be divided by measuring line, and you yourself shall die in an unclean land (Assyria); Israel shall be exiled far from its land.”

Ephesians 1:3-14

Paul probably wrote this letter during his first imprisonment in Rome, where he lived under house arrest from A.D. 60-62, awaiting trial before the tribunal of Caesar. It was written to the faithful in Ephesus, most likely with the intention that it be read by all the churches in the region. This book sets before us a vision of Christ reigning in heaven next to the Father and renewing the earth through his Church.⁶ In the time of Paul Ephesus was the leading city in Asia Minor. It contained the temple of the Roman goddess Diana, the goddess of fertility, which was considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The city's jewelers did a very profitable business through the manufacture of statuettes of the goddess — which explains why the people rioted, at the instigation of Demetrius the silversmith (Acts 19:24ff), and against Paul and his companions who naturally preached against superstition and the worship of idols.¹⁵

3Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ “In Christ” or “in him” is repeated over 30 times in this letter emphasizing the unity of men in Christ.⁴ **with every spiritual blessing in the heavens,** St. Thomas Aquinas commented on this section: “The apostle says, ‘Blessed be God’ that is, may I and you and everyone bless him with our heart, our mouth, our actions.”⁵

4as he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, This is to show that the choice is not accidental, but part of God’s plan from the beginning.⁴ **to be holy and without blemish before him.**

In the same way as in the Old Testament a victim offered to God had to be unblemished, for the blameless holiness to which God has destined us admits of no imperfection. By the very fact of being baptized we are made holy and are then called to live a holy life. Holiness is a gift of God, which at the same time implies an obligation to further its development: to become MORE holy!⁵

5In love The loving initiative is God’s. **he destined us** God determined from all eternity that the members of the new people of God should attain holiness through his gift of adoptive sonship. It is God’s desire that all be saved and he gives each person the means necessary for obtaining eternal life. Therefore, NO ONE IS PREDESTINED TO DAMNATION.⁵ This is not individual predestination but God’s choice for all mankind to share in His covenant life. (Romans 8:15)¹³ **for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ,** What is involved here is not simply formal adoption, which is something external and does not affect the very person of the child. Divine adoption affects man’s entire being, it inserts him into God’s own life for Baptism makes us truly his children and partakers of the divine nature.⁵ **in accordance with the favor of his will,**

6for the praise of the glory of his grace And this grace has been given for a purpose: to be pleasing and lovable in the eyes of God now that we are purified of our sins.⁵ **that he granted us in the beloved.** “The beloved” is Jesus Christ and this reminds us of the Baptism of Jesus when God said, “This is my BELOVED SON on whom my favor rests.”⁵

7In him we have redemption Redemption is the price paid to gain freedom for a slave. Jesus, through his death, paid the price to release us from our slavery to sin, from the power of the devil and from death.⁷ **by his blood, the forgiveness of transgressions,** Forgiveness was granted in the Old Testament on the basis of the shedding of the animal’s blood. We are now forgiven on the basis of the shedding of Jesus’ blood, not just with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the life blood of the Son of God! Leviticus 17:11 tells us that forgiveness is granted through blood. It is blood that makes the atonement.⁷

8in accord with the riches of his grace that he lavished upon us. By giving up his Son to death for the remission of our sins, God showed His great love for US! As John Paul II reminds us: “Above all, love is greater than sin, than weakness, than the futility of creation; it is stronger than death!”⁵

9In all wisdom and insight, he has made known to us the mystery of his will This mystery refers to the hidden plan of God to create a universal community of men in Christ.⁴ in accord with his favor
10that he set forth in him as a plan for the fullness of times, This fullness of time began with the Incarnation and it will last until the End.⁵ to sum up all things in Christ, The climax of God's plan is the reuniting of all things in Christ: he is to be the cornerstone and head of all creation. Christ unites and leads the created world-- whose unity had been destroyed as a result of sin--BACK TO GOD. Christ binds it all together, uniting heavenly things as well as mankind and other earthly things. Christ's being head of all things, Lord of all creation, will be made manifest at the end of time. The motto of Pius X echoed this idea: "Reinstating all things in Christ." Our task as Christians is to proclaim this kingship of Christ, announcing it through what we say and do. Our Lord wants men and women of his own to do this in all walks of life.⁵ in heaven and on earth. Adam was commissioned to "rule over the earth" while Christ, the new Adam is entrusted with the mission of ruling over the whole universe, "heaven and earth."⁴

11In him we were also chosen, destined in accord with the purpose of the One who accomplishes all things according to the intention of his will,

12so that we might exist for the praise of his glory, Through his Redemption, Christ has restored man's dignity and given meaning back to our lives. This meaning and purpose was lost to a large extent because of sin. we who first hoped in Christ.

13In him you "You" refers to the Gentile converts of Ephesus to whom St. Paul is talking.¹³ also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, Once a person has accepted the word of God, they are sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. A seal was a mark used in business to guarantee future payment of the agreed price in full. This seal is the pledge or guarantee of divine inheritance and proves that we have been accepted by God, incorporated into his Church, and given access to that salvation which had previously been reserved to Israel. Here we can see a parallelism between the "seal" of circumcision, which made the Old Covenant believer a member of the people of Israel, and the "seal" of the Holy Spirit in Baptism, which in the New Testament, makes people members of the Church.⁵

14which is the first installment of our inheritance One who accepts the gospel, whether Jew or Gentile, is then sealed with the Holy Spirit and their name is then, as it were, put on the will. They then share in the inheritance of which the Spirit is the "first payment."⁸ toward redemption as God's possession, to the praise of his glory.

Mark 6:7-13

This gospel reading immediately follows last week's reading where Jesus was rejected by his own people. That reading ended "He was amazed at their lack of faith."

7Jesus summoned the Twelve The Twelve chosen by Jesus receive a specific vocation to be "people sent out", which is what the word "apostles" means.¹² The fact that he chooses twelve is very significant because it is the same number as that of the twelve Patriarchs of Israel. Jesus sought in this way to emphasize the continuity that exists between the Old and New Testaments. The Twelve are the pillars on which Christ builds his Church.⁹ and began to send them out two by two St. Gregory the Great suggests that Jesus sent out the disciples in pairs to signify that the twin precepts of charity: love of God and love of neighbor, are indispensable for the duty of Christian preaching.⁹ Jewish law required two witnesses to establish the truth of any claim, plus the fact that they could

strengthen and encourage each other. This was also a caution against individualism.¹¹ **and gave them authority** Jesus gives them *exousia*, a Greek word that means both power and authorization. He is personally present to each of the six teams he sends out in their work of preaching, healing, and exorcism.¹¹ **over unclean spirits.**

8He instructed them to take nothing for the journey but a walking stick—no food, no sack, no money in their belts. These detailed directions were indications for the need to move quickly and to be totally DEPENDENT on God's care.¹² Jesus requires them to be free of any form of attachment if they are to preach the Gospel.¹³

9They were, however, to wear sandals but not a second tunic. The virtue of detachment is counseled here for without it the preacher's attention cannot be centered on the good news.³ This is a training exercise for leadership in the Church, when they will be summoned to embrace evangelical poverty and to trust in God for daily provisions.⁹

10He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave. Those who preach the Kingdom of God deserve their maintenance. However, the early church soon found that such hospitality could be abused by later missionaries, and the first century *Didache* ("Teaching of the Apostles") says that a missionary visit should not last more than two days. Even Paul at times worked to support himself, so that his motives would not be misread.¹¹

11Whatever place does not welcome you or listen to you, leave there and shake the dust off your feet in testimony against them." Palestinian Jews shook dust from their sandals when leaving Gentile territory. It was a derogatory statement against the uncleanness of the Gentiles as pagans and it showed the Jews' separation from Gentile customs and practices. Jesus commanded this gesture to signify judgment on those who rejected the gospel. He made it very clear that the apostles were not to blame if the message was not accepted by the people.⁷

12So they went off and preached repentance. Jesus preached repentance even before he selected the 12. They are now to do the same.¹³

13The Twelve drove out many demons, and they anointed with oil When the Church asks publicly and authoritatively in the name of Jesus Christ that a person or object be protected against the power of the Evil One and withdrawn from his dominion, it is called exorcism. Jesus performed exorcisms and from him the Church has received the power and office of exorcizing. In a simple form, exorcism is performed at the celebration of Baptism. The solemn exorcism can be performed only by a priest and with the permission of the bishop. It is directed at the expulsion of demons or to the liberation from demonic possession through the spiritual authority, which Jesus entrusted to his Church.¹⁰ (CCC 1673) Oil was a symbol of healing and a medicinal agent in the ancient world. According to the Council of Trent, the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick is suggested by this text.⁹ The Anointing of the Sick, which is an extension and an instrument of the healing power of Jesus, should be received by anyone of the faithful who begins to be in danger of death or who is about to have a serious operation or who is elderly.¹⁰ (CCC 1514) Down to our own time, the Church has taken seriously the order of Christ to "heal the sick." We do this by taking care of the sick as well as by accompanying them with our prayer of intercession and through the sacraments and in an altogether special way through the EUCHARIST, the bread that gives eternal life and that St. Paul suggests is connected with bodily health!¹⁰ (CCC 1509) **many who were sick and cured them.**

Scott Hahn's advice to people who want to make the most of the Bible in their life is: "Read the Bible from the heart of the Church. Read the Bible along with the Church, with the Old and the New Testaments as they appear together in the lectionary. Listen to them in the liturgy, but read them, too, either before Mass in preparation or afterward in meditation. Taking the Scriptures in devotional reading and participating in the Mass creates a sort of feedback loop. THE MORE YOU DO ONE, THE BETTER YOU DO THE OTHER."

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) "Dictionary of the Bible" by John L. McKenzie, S.J., (2) "The Bread of Life Catholic Bible Study" by Deacon Ken and Marie Finn, (3) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers:2005" by Aelred R. Rosser, (4) "The Jerome Biblical Commentary," (5) "The Navarre Bible: Captivity Epistles, (6) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Letters of St. Paul to the Galatians & Ephesians" With Introduction, Commentary and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (7) "The Bread of Life Catholic Bible Study" by Deacon Ken & Marie Finn, (8) "Workbook For Lectors And Gospel Readers: 1991" by Graziano Marcheschi with Nancy Seitz Marcheschi, (9) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Mark," With Introduction, Commentary and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (10) "The Catechism of the Catholic Church," (11) "Mark: Good News for Hard Times" by George T. Montague, S.M., (12) "The Collegeville Bible Commentary: Mark" by Philip Van Linden, C.M., and (13) The St. Paul Center For Biblical Theology Online Founded By Dr. Scott Hahn.

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