

## 25<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time - C

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

### **1<sup>st</sup> Reading - Amos 8:4-7**

Amos was the earliest of the written prophets. He was born in Tekoa, near Bethlehem, probably around the beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC. This was before the fall of the kingdom of Israel. While he was shepherding his flock he was called by God to prophesy in the northern kingdom. Amos makes it quite clear in his book that God's choice of him was quite unmerited, because he was neither "a prophet nor the son of a prophet." He ministered in the reign of Jeroboam II (783-743 BC), using as his base the schismatic shrine at Bethel. He was a contemporary of Hosea.

At that time the northern kingdom, thanks to its conquests, was enjoying a period of great prosperity, but there were sharp contrasts between rich and poor and many instances of inequality and injustice: the spirit of true religion was difficult to find. Amos, a deeply religious man, zealous for God's glory, condemns dissolute city life, social injustice and insincerity of religious worship. He exposes those who exploit the poor and upbraids judges for their venality.

The book is a hymn to God's omnipotence and to the permanence of the covenant. It is full of rich imagery and vivid parables based on the pastoral and rural life with which Amos was so familiar. Through this he passes on God's message; if the people do not change their ways they will soon be punished by Yahweh: the kingdom will collapse and the inhabitants will be sent into exile. This is the last chance God will give them to avoid this outcome. In spite of all the criticism the prophet levels at his people, there is still, as always, a shaft of hope; in the context of the repentance to which he calls them, he speaks of future salvation for the remnant of Joseph who with the remnant of Judah will experience the grace of messianic restoration.

**<sup>4</sup> Hear this, you who trample upon the needy and destroy the poor of the land! <sup>5</sup> "When will the new moon be over," you ask,**

Numbers 28:11-15 prescribes that on the first day of each new lunar month a holocaust should be offered consisting of 2 bulls, a ram, and 7 lambs, as well as other offerings and libations; a goat was also to be offered, as a sacrifice for sin. This celebration of the first day of the new moon is ancient in origin. Like the Sabbath, it was a day of rest when no business was transacted. It continued to be a festive day to the end of Old Testament times and even into the New Testament period (see Colossians 2:16).

**"that we may sell our grain, and the sabbath, that we may display the wheat?"**

Also a day of reverence and rest (the 3<sup>rd</sup> commandment). Failure to observe the Sabbath was punishable by death (Exodus 31:14-15). Failure to participate in Sunday Mass is a mortal sin – it kills the soul if not confessed and forgiven. The Israelites wait impatiently for the termination of the holy days so that they can engage in lucrative business practice. The plutocratic landlords would cheat and oppress the poor.

**We will diminish the ephah,**

A dry measure equal to slightly more than a bushel. Law forbade Israelite merchants to make use of a dishonest ephah measure (Leviticus 19:36; Deuteronomy 25:14-15).

**add to the shekel,**

A conventionally established unit of weight (about 2/5 ounce).

**and fix our scales for cheating!**

The excavation of Tizah, the earlier capital of Israel, has brought to light the use of several sets of weights.

**<sup>6</sup> We will buy the lowly man for silver, and the poor man for a pair of sandals; even the refuse of the wheat we will sell!"**

The merchants are so greedy that they sell what should be discarded.

**<sup>7</sup> The LORD has sworn by the pride of Jacob:**

This may be a synonym for Yahweh Himself.

**Never will I forget a thing they have done!**

**2<sup>nd</sup> Reading - 1 Timothy 2:1-8**

Last week we heard St. Paul advising Timothy about false teachers and the damage they were doing. Today we hear him advise about public prayer.

**<sup>2:1</sup> First of all, then, I ask that supplications, prayers, petitions, and thanksgivings be offered for everyone,**

Every human being is to be included in the intercessory and thanksgiving prayer intentions of the community.

**<sup>2</sup> for kings and for all in authority, that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all devotion and dignity.**

Like the Jews, Christians did not participate in civic worship of the gods and so were suspect. In part to offset that suspicion both groups made it clear that they did pray for the welfare of the emperor and other civic authorities. In Romans 13:1-7 we are told to be obedient to the civil authorities and are reminded that these authorities are established by God. Here the prayer is not out of a concern for patriotism but out of a desire that the authorities might allow the Christians to lead a peaceful and quiet life and that the authorities might come to a clear knowledge of the truth.

**<sup>3</sup> This is good and pleasing to God our savior, <sup>4</sup> who wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth.**

“Is God not good to all, then? He is certainly good to all, because He is the Savior of all, especially the faithful. And so the Lord Jesus came that He might save what was lost (Luke 19:10); he came, indeed, to take away the sin of the world (John 1:29) to heal our wounds. But not all desire the remedy, and many avoid it . . . He heals those that are willing and does not compel the unwilling.” [Saint Ambrose of Milan (ca. A.D. 350), *The Prayer of Job and David* 2,4]

**<sup>5</sup> For there is one God.**

If God is one, He must be concerned with all peoples, not just with this or that group or nation.

**There is also one mediator between God and the human race, Christ Jesus,**

The repetition of the word “one” links Christ with God. This does not mean that we should not pray for one another, or that those who have gone before us cannot intercede for us. We hear from Jesus’ own lips in the story of Lazarus and the Rich Man (Luke 16:19-31, our Gospel reading for next week) of the intercession of the rich man for his brothers who are still alive. It is through Jesus’ once-for-all sacrifice on the altar of the cross that heaven has been opened and we can approach God and have our individual sins forgiven.

“Through His body the Church has been allied to Christ and has been enabled to become a partaker in the Word of God. We know this both from the fact that He is called the ‘mediator between God and the human race,’ and from the apostle’s saying that ‘in Him we have access through faith in the hope of the glory of God (Romans 5:2).” [Origen (ca. A.D. 240), *Homilies on Song of Songs* 3,2]

**himself human, <sup>6</sup> who gave himself as ransom**

See Mark 10:45. The ransom refers to the sacrifice which He made so that we would no longer be slaves/servants of God and would become His children.

**for all.**

The emphasis is on the universality of Christ's work.

**This was the testimony at the proper time.**

The time chosen by God for the salvation of men (Titus 1:3; Galatians 4:4; Ephesians 1:10).

**<sup>7</sup> For 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 has been appointed to preach this message of salvation. The terms "apostle" and "teacher" lend emphasis to his assertion. It is his commission to lead the Gentiles to faith; the object of this faith is divine truth.

**<sup>8</sup> It is my wish, then, that in every place the men should pray, lifting up holy hands,**

In early Christian art this is the normal posture of a person at prayer – standing, with hands outstretched, and with palms turned upward toward heaven to indicate receptivity of God's gifts.

"Even a person's bearing, when he raises his hands, describes a cross; therefore we are ordered to pray with uplifted hands so that by the very stance of our body we might confess the Lord's suffering." [Maximus, Bishop of Turin (died A.D. 408/423), *Sermons* 38,3]

**without anger or argument.**

See Philippians 2:14. According to Paul, the false teachers typically promote debates and arguments (1 Timothy 6:4; 2 Timothy 2:14, 23). To be at peace with one's neighbor is a necessary condition of effective prayer (see Matthew 5:23-24; 6:14; Mark 11:25).

### **Gospel - Luke 16:1-13**

Having heard last week the three parables of mercy (the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son), this week we continue with Jesus' teaching through the use of parables. We now hear the first parable about riches (sharing with the needy).

**<sup>16:1</sup> Then he [Jesus] also said to his disciples, "A rich man had a steward**

The rich man was an absentee landlord. The steward was usually a slave born in the household and possessed great authority and full responsibility. Like the tax collector, the steward must show a profit for his master, but he could also procure personal benefits by means of adroit loans and extravagant interest. The legal system presupposed by this parable is a widely attested one and is contrary to the Old Testament ban of usury. The steward was authorized to make binding contracts for his master. The usurious interest would not be listed

separately in the contract, but would be included in the one lump sum mentioned in the contract. Fifty bushels of wheat at 100% interest would be shown as a debt of 100 bushels in the contract.

**who was reported to him for squandering his property.**

Losing the property. The owner has believed the charges brought against the steward.

**<sup>2</sup> He summoned him and said, 'What is this I hear about you? Prepare a full account of your stewardship, because you can no longer be my steward.'** **<sup>3</sup> The 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.'** **<sup>4</sup> I know what I shall do so that, when I am removed from the stewardship, they may welcome me into their homes.'**

This is Aorist Greek. The full meaning is "I have known all along what I shall do in a case like this."

**<sup>5</sup> He called in his master's debtors one by one.**

Although he, as steward, has made the contracts, they are the debtors of the landlord.

**To the first he said, 'How much do you owe my master?'** **<sup>6</sup> He replied, 'One hundred measures of olive oil.'**

At least 900 gallons – the yield of about 146 olive trees

**He said to him, 'Here is your promissory note. Sit down and quickly write one for fifty.'** **<sup>7</sup> Then to another he said, 'And you, how much do you owe?' He replied, 'One hundred kors of wheat.'**

100 kors is at least 1,100 bushels; the yield of about 100 acres.

**He said to him, 'Here is your promissory note; write one for eighty.'** **<sup>8</sup> And the master commended that dishonest steward**

The devious employee had endangered his master's security or wealth. What the steward probably did was to cancel the excessive interest he had required for his own personal profit.

**for acting prudently.**

He took decisive steps in the time of crisis, knowing what to do ahead of time.

**"For the children of this world are more prudent in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light.**

The steward represents the enthusiastic response which people of this age show in their dealings with one another and contrasts sharply with the lackluster response of the disciples to Jesus' kingdom.

**<sup>9</sup> I tell you, make friends for yourselves with dishonest wealth,**

Literally "mammon of iniquity." Mammon is the Greek transliteration of the Aramaic or Hebrew word that is usually explained as meaning "that in which one trusts." Use prudently the wealth that you have, in order to ensure your status within the final age; remember that wealth tends to lend men to dishonesty.

**so that when it fails,**

When earthly goods fail, you will be welcomed into the everlasting tents of the Kingdom of God. Some Greek texts and the Vulgate read "when you fail" rather than "when it fails you."

**you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings. <sup>10</sup> The 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. <sup>11</sup> If, therefore, you are not trustworthy with dishonest wealth, who will trust you with true wealth?**

The Christian must make a prudent, restrained use of earthly goods.

**<sup>12</sup> If you are not trustworthy with what belongs to another, who will give you what is yours?**

**<sup>13</sup> No servant can serve two masters.**

One must set their eyes on God and not on something else.

**He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."**

The disciple must give exclusive loyalty to God or succumb to the enslavement of money (earthly things, mammon), and one is loyal to God by sharing what they have with others; especially those in want.