

## Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time: Chosen to be Prophets

Today's readings reflect on God's choice of people to be prophets. In the first reading we hear about the prophet Amos. Now, when we think of prophets we think about people who were prophets all of their lives, people like Samuel, or Elijah, or the prophets in David's court such as Nathan or Gad, or the three prophets who have large books in the Old Testament, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

But Amos was different. He was not a prophet for life. He was a dresser of trees, a keeper of sheep, an ordinary working man. Still God called him to prophecy to the people of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. By his time, there were two Jewish Kingdoms, the Kingdom of Israel with Bethel as its sanctuary and the Kingdom of Judah centered on Jerusalem. Amos actually lived in the Southern Kingdom, but his home was just south of the border with the North. God called him to go across the border to Bethel. The people of the Northern Kingdom had prospered. Then they strayed away from their worship of Yahweh. Their leaders, including their religious leaders, made accommodations with the pagans. They had taken up many of their practices. So Amos crossed the border and prophesied to them that destruction was coming for their sins. The priest of Bethel, Amaziah, told him to get lost, go back to where he came from. Amos said that he was not there because he thought this would be a good idea. He wasn't even a prophet as many other prophets. He was just an everyday man whom God chose. In another section of the *Book of the Prophet Amos*, Amos said, "When the lion roars, who cannot but listen. Amos is often pictured with a lion, the voice of God roaring for him to proclaim the truth.

The Gospel reading presents the mission that Jesus gave to the Twelve disciples to proclaim the Kingdom of Heaven. He shared with them some of the power he had. He gave them authority over unclean spirits. That meant that they could heal people. At that time infirmity was seen as the action of demonic spirits. The gospel concluded, "So they went off and preached repentance. The Twelve drove out many demons, and they anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them." So here we have ordinary people, like Amos, going off and performing miracles. The Lion roared. The Lion of Judah, Jesus Christ, called the Twelve to prophesy. How could they not proclaim the Gospel, even if they and many, many who would come after them would be put to death for preaching the Good News of Jesus Christ.

These two readings lead me to focus on today's second reading, from the beginning of the *Letter to the Ephesians*. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens, as he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish before him." Paul is not speaking about himself. He is speaking about us. We have been chosen by God. Like Amos, we have been chosen to be prophets. The Lion has roared. We need to prophesy. A prophet is someone who proclaims the truth. We need to proclaim the Truth of Jesus Christ. Like the Twelve we have been chosen to drive out demons, What demons? The demons of fear, of deceitfulness, of materialism, of pagan values,

the demons of sickness, of psychological, mental and physical ills. We have been called to tell the truth that all that matters is Jesus Christ. This is how we prophesy.

We listen closely to the Lord. We hear his voice in the Word of God, the Bible. We hear his voice in the proclamation of scripture in the homily. We hear his voice in the teaching of the Church. And, particularly, we hear his voice within us when we receive the Eucharist and in our prayer life.

It is His voice that roars. It is His message that we must proclaim. We are not called to proclaim our own message. We are not to use religion for our own ends. People can easily use religion to become rich. (Just so you know, your priests are protected from this by having their salaries set by the Diocese. We buy or lease our own cars, and we pay our own bills and our taxes. We cannot use our position to enrich ourselves.) No one should use religion, as sadly some have, for their own personal gain. There is nothing new about people using religion to proclaim their own message. Jesus spoke about this in the Sermon on the Mount when he told his disciples not to be like the hypocrites who make a great show of saying their prayers and donating money so all could see them.

The Lion has roared for us to proclaim the message of Jesus, not the message of some internet site. There are some people who have their own agendas. They transfer their upset with themselves upon others. There are internet sites that are in constant attack against the Holy Father, the Bishops and anyone who does not joining their radical view of the faith. Christ did not call us to oppose His Church. He called us to proclaim its truths.

We have been chosen to proclaim not our own message or the message of others, but to proclaim the message of Jesus Christ. The message of the Lord, the Gospel, is the good news that we are loved by Jesus Christ. It is the good news that He forgives us and that He is with us. The second reading is so beautifully comforting. God has chosen us for love. We are to proclaim the love of Christ mainly by being people of kindness. Jesus was the kindest man to ever live. He told us to follow Him. I think about the quote from 1 Cor 13 that is posted on a sign overlooking the leper colony of Kaluapapa where St. Damien of Molokai served and died. That sign says, simply, "Love conquers all." That is what we have been called to proclaim with our lives.

The world needs us to be prophets of the truth. So many people have lost their grip on truth. So many people choose to believe whatever they want, even if that means denying reality. When Pilate asked, "Truth, what is truth?," he was reflecting a cynical world that had lost its way. He could not even recognize truth when it stood before him.

The Lion is roaring. We have been chosen by God to be prophets. We are valuable to the Lord. We have worth. We are people he has called to live in His Love and to spread His Love. May we be prophets of His Truth.