

## **Homily for the 15th Sunday of Year B**

### **PROPHET AMOS AND THE PRIEST OF BETHEL: LESSONS FOR US.**

In the second reading, St Paul reminds the Ephesians and all of us here today that before the foundation of the world, God has chosen us in Christ to be his own and to be holy and without blemish before him. Whenever we lose sight of this purpose of God, we practice an empty religion like the Israelites of the time of Amaziah, the idolatrous priest of Bethel during the reign of Jeroboam 2 (786-746 BC).

Actually, Bethel used to be a very sacred place for the Lord God. Jacob even built a temple and worshipped God there (Gen 35:1-7). But after the division of Israel into Southern and Northern Kingdoms and Jeroboam 1 became the first king of the Northern Kingdom, he molded and placed a golden calf in Bethel and asked the people to worship there instead of going to the Jerusalem Temple. He appointed priests and prophets under his payroll, and so did his bidding. The purpose was to prevent the Israelites from worshiping God in the Jerusalem Temple and prevent the kingdom from reverting to the house of David (1 Kings 12:26-32). Amaziah was the Chief priest of Bethel during the reign of Jeroboam 2 when God called Amos from the Southern Kingdom to go and prophesy for him to the people of Northern Israel.

Before God called Amos, he was a Shepherd and dresser of Sycamores. However, because Amaziah and others with him were on the King's payroll, he thought Amos must have been a job seeker prophesied to get his daily bread. Before confronting Amos, he first ran to King Jeroboam to report the activities and utterances of the perceived intruder (Amos 7:10-11). Then he returned to ask Amos to leave Bethel, return to Judah, and prophesy there to get his daily bread.

Amos did not take this misconception lightly. He proudly told Amaziah that he was not prophesying for material gain. In fact, he was neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet. He was gainfully self-employed as a shepherd and dresser of Sycamores before God called him to this mission. He went ahead to fearlessly prophesy against the king, the city, and even Amaziah himself and against their atrocities as the Lord God commanded him to do (Amos 7:16-17, 8:1-9:6).

Amaziah represents those who put their personal interest and material gain before the Master's Mission. They shy away from speaking the truth to protect and preserve their sources of income, friendship, relationships, and other gains. He represents those who take offense rather than turn a new leaf when friends or family members point out to them their unholy, ungodly, unchristian, unjust, inconsiderate, and uncharitable lifestyle. He represents those who always and readily perceive and act on the

bitterness of truth rather than the positive change and transformation the truth could bring.

Christ does not want his disciples to treat his mission as a mere money-yielding business like Amaziah. Knowing the harm that an inordinate quest for or undue focus or attachment to material gain could cause to the gospel message, he gave his apostles specific instructions on what to carry and what not to take along in their journey as he sent them out on a mission in today's gospel. He wanted them to remain focused on the mission, relying entirely on him and the generosity of the people as they delivered his message of repentance and forgiveness of sins to them. In other words, he wanted them to give his message like Amos; selflessly and faithfully, devoid of unnecessary encumbrances, enjoying the people's generosity (Lk 10:8), but without demanding it themselves to the point of becoming compromised and watering down the gospel message to please or avoid offending their benefactors. They may be rejected in some places, but even in the face of rejection, they should neither impose themselves on the people nor lower the standard of the gospel message just to be accepted.

Jesus does not always sit back and wait for people who have strayed to come to him. He, more often than not, goes to them. He seeks to bring them back, using his disciples as instruments, including every one of us. We are all preachers, teachers, and prophets by virtue of our baptism and are expected to influence people positively in our day-to-day lives. Not every one of us is sent out as a priest, bishop, or deacon; some are sent to the families and other ministries in the church and outside the church. Before taking me to the Beartooth driveway and the Yellow Stone Park on Wednesday, Deacon Tom took me to St Vincent the Paul facility, where I observed with amazement and gratitude to God how the homeless were fed and cared for. Christ has his disciples there, too, patiently and lovingly taking care of those homeless with the support of most of you here.

You are among the disciples sent out by Christ. So, where has he sent you, and what impact exactly does he want you to make there? No matter where you have been sent or where you will be sent in the future, do not let your personal interest or inordinate quest for material gain come between you and the mission entrusted to you by Christ. Do not settle for anything below the standard of the Christian faith and mission to satisfy your selfish desires. Make it a point of Christian duty to lead those you encounter daily to Christ and never away from him. Anything less than this would amount to a misstep, and no matter how far we go in the wrong direction, we will never be able to get to the right destination of our journey of faith.