

Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time July 12, 2015

Amos 6:7-13; Ephesians 1:3-14; Mark 6:7-13

Every human person in today's world seeks to find meaning to his or her life. People particularly young ones are often discouraged when they are unable to perceive the why of life and aim to search for it in wrong and absurd ways. According to the theologian Paul Tillich the word God translates as the depth of our life, the source of our being, and our ultimate concern, what we take seriously without any reservations. So our search for meaning connects with our search for God. Every human person has a purpose to fulfil in life. All have a specific task and are individually called by God for a task or a mission. The call that God gives is personal. We will not comprehend the mission easily unless we are totally attentive to his calling just as young Samuel was and respond as Isaiah or Jeremiah prophet did. Our entire person must be totally attentive to his invitation. All the three readings of today tell us of the mission that is specifically given to every individual by Jesus. In the Gospel of Mark we see Jesus sending out his disciples on a mission. They are sent to the Israelite community to proclaim the message of the kingdom of God. They are to proclaim the need for repentance and offer them the gift of healing. Jesus relies on human support in preaching the gospel to people. In the first reading Prophet Amos refuses to abandon his mission. He must speak God's word to those who need to hear it. In the second reading we praise Father, Son and Spirit for lavishing us with every spiritual blessing. We bask in their freely given divine love and intimate care.

In the First Reading we heard the Lord instructing Prophet Amos to go and to prophesy to the people Israel. Amos was a native of Judah. He was a shepherd by profession and dresser of sycamore trees. Such person was called by God to be the shepherd of his people. He was given the task of communicating the word of God with a call to repentance in order to be saved. He protested strongly against the religious abuses and the lack of religion then rampant in Israel. Amos as well as the people were aware of the role of a prophet namely to speak for God and uphold his values. Amos would have spoken things that displeased the king and the priest of the place. Amaziah who held the rank of the priest told him that the king was angry with him and he was seeking to kill him. It was better that Amos looked for his own safety. Amos tells him that in the eyes of God the Temple that Amaziah served was not legitimate as it was established by the royal household. For this reason God's prophets challenged this Temple. Now Amos was accused that he was speaking on his own behalf. But Amos re-emphasizes the call of God. He told the priest that it is God who called him from nowhere for this mission and God will protect him. God had asked him to speak his word which is the word of truth and he was bound to speak. In other words, he explained that before the choice of God the human choice will be null and void. He was given the mission to cultivate faith in their hearts. He told the King and Amaziah that they must listen to God and choose life.

In the Second Reading Paul tells the Ephesians that we were chosen by God before creation and wanted to be saved by the blood of his son Jesus. The motive of God's choice is love. His plan for humanity existed from the beginning as he cared for each and every one. God did not choose them when they committed themselves at Baptism or because of any good deeds. He chose because they are his own and have existed in the eternal plan of salvation. The choice of the Father is such that he never abandons anyone. Having destined the chosen ones for adoption as His children through Jesus Christ, the Father chose all to be holy and blameless before Him in love. And all of this is freely given to manifest the praise of his

glorious grace. He has made them his chosen ones his real children, purchased by his blood and makes them precious before him. He has given all these gifts freely that they may fully inherit the divine life. He wanted that our inheritance that comes through Christ, through whom they were destined according to the Will of God to be called the children of God. Their hope had to be in Christ to live for the praise of his glory. Jesus Christ is the visible embodiment of God's love. Through his Son, God has granted his people forgiveness and has brought creation back to himself. The Holy Spirit is Trinitarian gift and is the first instalment of the heavenly inheritance. That is the reason why Paul starts with the words, "Blessed be our God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places."

The Gospel of today tells us of the mission and ministry of Jesus where the master accepts human helps to continue his work. For Jesus from the beginning it has been a shared ministry. He invites his own chosen men to work with him. Jesus had been quietly training his chosen Apostles for some time. They had heard his preaching they had seen the miracles worked by him. Their future work will be to bring his teaching and the story of his life and miracles to all people. They were not fully aware of the real Jesus whom they accepted as their master but they knew that he was planning something great. They were being prepared for the challenge he was placing before them. As the Gospel unfolds, that shared ministry grows until we see Jesus calling the twelve and giving them authority over unclean spirits as well as to preach repentance. People had been watching and admiring his work and they wanted his presence in other towns and villages to come to preach and also work miracles there. But as a human person Jesus was unable to reach out everywhere and he called the twelve apostles together and gave them a task to do his work and fulfil the special mission given to him by the Father. He instructed them to go out, two by two, and, heal people as they drive out "unclean" spirits. They were to do the task he himself was doing and continue doing his mission of healing. It was not just to conquer the evil spirits but more importantly to bring reconciliation and healing. They were to trust absolutely in God's providence. He would see to it that those to whom they preached would provide them with the necessities of life. They were called upon to cure the sick, reduce the pain of people and destroy the power of the evil one. In reality they were to be participants in the ministry of Jesus. By sharing this power with the twelve, Jesus brings them into full association with his own mission. He involves his disciples while he sends them out to be his instruments of liberation, to help others recover their freedom.

Jesus sends his disciples two by two on a temporary mission. Going two by two carries with it the authority of official witnesses. Only Mark mentions this detail in his Gospel while Matthew and Luke do not speak of it on this occasion. But in another passage Luke says: "After this the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them on ahead of him, two by two." This has a profound meaning that needs to be explained. Indeed, it amounts to saying that the disciple of the Lord is never alone: he is always accompanied by another disciple of the Lord, that is, a man or a woman not chosen by the disciple himself, but rather a person whom the Lord himself chose to be his companion and helper in the apostolate. This person may be an equal, but may also be a superior, perhaps even the Pope himself. The mission of the Church is always accomplished in the company of others: the disciple is never alone. Again the Lord takes care of all his needs while on mission by providing them the necessities of life. While on mission they had to trust in the absolute providence of God.

If Jesus takes care in choosing his disciples in order to ensure a good beginning to the mission he entrusts to them, he also watches over the mission itself to ensure that it proceeds

well. Here we notice that the discipleship demands a lifestyle of radical simplicity while the other demands he makes of them are heavy. The instructions we find in the Gospel probably reflect the directives that were given to the Christian missionaries of Mark's time. The main point of the instructions was that the disciple must trust that God through the community will provide the essentials of food and housing. Clothing and accessories must be kept to an absolute minimum. Jesus tells them that if they are to help people recover their freedom, they too must be a free people. So he instructs them saying that as they go out to evangelize, they should not bring many things with them. No food, no backpack, no money, no extra clothes, no sandals or staff. This teaching does not seem to be very practical to our ears. He also tells them that when his disciples were on the mission of the kingdom, there would be at least some to welcome them and give them what they needed, namely they will receive proper hospitality. They are not to look for comfort, but rather seek a place where God dwells, a place of peace. The elements of food, tunic, sandals and staff, all placed within the context of a journey indicates that this is a second exodus which will once again lead them through the wilderness.

Jesus strictly instructs his disciples to stay at the house they originally enter. They must not be preoccupied with finding better and more comfortable accommodations. This would violate the customs of hospitality as well give impression that the disciples were concerned primarily with themselves and their own comfort. Besides to leave the house that has welcomed them would be to insult their kind host. If they were rejected or if no one received them in that place, they were to depart immediately. He tells them to shake the dust off their feet at the door of the inhospitable householder or at the end of the village if the villagers refused to hear them and go to a more hospitable environment. Of course the gesture of shaking the dust from one's feet was, in effect, equal to cursing that place. With this commission and with these instructions, the Twelve are depicted as heading off to preach repentance. This action also signified that they were cleansing themselves of all pagan contamination. The entire mission of the disciples reflects the post resurrection community of mark, but remains rooted in the mission and ministry of Jesus. However, the essence of their preaching was that the Kingdom of God is coming and they have to prepare themselves by repenting from their sins. At the same time they were given the power to cast out demons, anoint the people with oil and heal them, and more importantly preach the proximity of the Kingdom of God. Jesus today is inviting us to cooperate with him. He wants us to be his instruments of liberation, to help others recover their freedom.

Thus the Gospel today is telling us that each Christian is called not only to be a disciple but also to be an apostle. A disciple is one who hears, who accepts and who carries out the teaching of Jesus in his/her life. A disciple follows Jesus, imitates Jesus, and becomes a second Christ. An apostle is not only a follower but also an evangelizer. He is to be sent on a mission with a message from a superior – an ambassador, an envoy. Every person who has been baptized has this mission and this calling, actively to share their faith with others. We work with the lord to help people find or recover their freedom. We help people to cure their sicknesses, physical, psychological and emotional. Secondly, Jesus is telling us to go through our lives with the maximum of freedom and the minimum of burdens. The apostles were told to go out bringing with them only the message they had received from Jesus and nothing else. They were not to carry with them any earthly material goods which would be an obstacle in their mission work. He stresses on their poverty and emptiness in the mission. All of us have heavy burdens to carry that have come from the past or from the present situations. There worries and anxieties in our heads which also can paralyze us and prevent us living rich and enriching lives. Jesus himself is a model for us for he was materially poor and had did not

have a shelter of his own. He could have possessed whatever he needed but it was not to be. He was born poor and he died poor and in fact he lived a life of poverty. But he tells us that each of us has a calling according to the Divine Will of God. We all have been commissioned through Jesus Christ to lead a life worthy of adoption to become children of God.

We are aware that Christ the Son of God could have spread his Gospel of peace and love and the message of eternal salvation to the whole world without any human help. Yet he chose the weaker and more human way of evangelizing people by sending their own fellowmen who brought the Good News to them. This choice showed his divine love and understanding of weak human nature much better and more effectively than the use of any supernatural means which he could have employed. Today we realize that we all have been sent by God and the church to spread and defend the faith before our family, our friends and our co-workers, we can expect that our Christian obligation will not be easy. We have to be prepared to be rejected by many or even our own communities because we represent Jesus on earth. But we should feel happy because we are in good company. We will be counted among those who have been rejected, like Jesus himself, Peter and Paul, Stephen the deacon and all the martyrs of the Church. We will be counted among our brothers and sisters in Christ who today are sharing the same hardship in the hope of the glory to come. What is important for us is to listen to the voice of the Lord continuously. While we thank God from our hearts today for having been put on the road to heaven let us remember all those whom we serve that they may truly realize the meaning of the kingdom through us.

One day, as usually, an orphan, a little girl, stood at the street corner begging for food, money or whatever she could get. Now, this girl was wearing very tattered clothes, was dirty and quite dishevelled. A well-to-do you man passed that corner without giving the girl a second look. But, when he returned to his expensive home, his happy and comfortable family, and his well-laden dinner table, his thoughts returned to the young orphan. He became very angry with God for allowing such conditions to exist. He reproached God, saying, How can you let this happen Why don t you do something to help this girl. Then he heard God in the depths of his being responding by saying “Yes friend I did something. I created you.”

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