

## Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

### Reading 1

[Am 7:12-15](#)

Amaziah, priest of Bethel, said to Amos,  
"Off with you, visionary, flee to the land of Judah!  
There earn your bread by prophesying,  
but never again prophesy in Bethel;  
for it is the king's sanctuary and a royal temple."  
Amos answered Amaziah, "I was no prophet,  
nor have I belonged to a company of prophets;  
I was a shepherd and a dresser of sycamores.  
The LORD took me from following the flock, and said to me,  
Go, prophesy to my people Israel."

### Responsorial Psalm

[Ps 85:9-10, 11-12, 13-14](#)

**R. (8) Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation.**

I will hear what God proclaims;  
the LORD—for he proclaims peace.  
Near indeed is his salvation to those who fear him,  
glory dwelling in our land.

**R. Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation.**

Kindness and truth shall meet;  
justice and peace shall kiss.  
Truth shall spring out of the earth,  
and justice shall look down from heaven.

**R. Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation.**

The LORD himself will give his benefits;  
our land shall yield its increase.  
Justice shall walk before him,  
and prepare the way of his steps.

**R. Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation.**

### Reading II

[Eph 1:3-14 or Eph 1:3-10](#)

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.  
In love he destined us for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ,  
in accord with the favor of his will,  
for the praise of the glory of his grace  
that he granted us in the beloved.  
In him we have redemption by his blood,  
the forgiveness of transgressions,

in accord with the riches of his grace that he lavished upon us.  
In all wisdom and insight, he has made known to us  
the mystery of his will in accord with his favor  
that he set forth in him as a plan for the fullness of times,  
to sum up all things in Christ, in heaven and on earth.

In 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,  
so that we might exist for the praise of his glory,  
we who first hoped in Christ.

In him you 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,  
which is the first installment of our inheritance  
toward redemption as God's possession, to the praise of his glory.

**or**

Eph 1:3-10

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.  
In love he destined us for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ,  
in accord with the favor of his will,  
for the praise of the glory of God's grace  
that he granted us in the beloved.

In him we have redemption by his blood,  
the forgiveness of transgressions,  
in accord with the riches of his grace that he lavished upon us.  
In all wisdom and insight, he has made known to us  
the mystery of his will in accord with his favor  
that he set forth in him as a plan for the fullness of times,  
to sum up all things in Christ, in heaven and on earth.

## **Gospel**

[Mk 6:7-13](#)

Jesus summoned the Twelve and began to send them out two by two  
and gave them authority over unclean spirits.  
He instructed them to take nothing for the journey  
but a walking stick—  
no food, no sack, no money in their belts.  
They were, however, to wear sandals  
but not a second tunic.  
He said to them,  
"Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave.

Whatever place does not welcome you or listen to you,  
leave there and shake the dust off your feet  
in testimony against them."  
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.

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## HOMILY

Jesus told the disciples to take nothing for the journey: no bread, no backpack, no money . . . just shoes and a walking stick. They were to travel lightly. They would depend upon people's generosity for food and a bed. And all the while Jesus would be their bread. Jesus would feed them in so many ways. They brought very little with them as they went off to preach repentance, drive out demons, and cure the sick. They're asked to do a lot with so little.

I feel for the disciples today. As you know, this week I will move east, from Berkeley back to the Bronx. Last week the movers came and loaded up all my stuff to drive it to New York. I've been sitting in a bare office: just a desk and chair, my computer and telephone. What I miss most is my books. An academic without books feels insecure. All my knowledge lies within them. Without them, I know nothing. You may think me obsessive but I kept a small bookcase right near my desk, filled with reference books: my Bible, dictionary, the Catechism and Code of Canon Law, and all the ritual books. When a colleague came by, or a reporter called with a question, I could reach over and grab the book and find the reference – and they think I'm so smart. But without books I don't know anything. So, after Mass, if you ask me a question other than the weather or the Yankees, I'll have to refer you to Fr. Tim; he's the pastor; he knows everything. That's why I feel for the disciples today. They're going off to do great work with very little ... or so it seems.

The disciples leave with mixed emotions. On the one hand, they're eager. They've been watching and listening to Jesus – inspired by his teaching, amazed at his miracles. Do you remember two weeks ago: how Jesus healed two women in one afternoon? He healed the twelve year old girl, the daughter of Jairus. Everyone said she was dead, and Jesus raised her up. And then, on the way there, the elderly woman with a hemorrhage, touched Jesus' cloak and she was healed. The gossip about Jesus spread all over. He was more popular than Michael Jackson. The disciples were proud to play a part in this: to walk with Jesus, to know him and learn from him. They wanted a chance to spread the good news. They remind me of the Jesuit deacons who preach here: they've been studying for so long, and they're eager to tell the good news from their own experience of prayer, study, and service. So, on the one hand, the disciples are eager.

On the other hand, they're wary, worried that they will be rejected. Remember last week: how Jesus was invited to preach in his hometown synagogue. And some of the people in the pews snickered: "Isn't he a carpenter? Isn't he Mary's son?" A carpenter: a lowly common laborer, not a man of learning; he has no books. Mary's son: This was a sharp insult. Usually a child was referred to through the father's lineage, like "Jesus bar Joseph" (Jesus, son of Joseph). To refer to him as "Mary's son" suggests that we don't know who the father is. It's insulting. That's why St. Mark adds that Jesus could not do anything there; he was amazed at their lack of faith. Jesus shook the dust off his feet and walked on. So, the disciples were wary and Jesus warns them: expect rejection, but don't be discouraged; keep going. I will be your bread. And so they go.

The disciples sound like the prophet Amos. He protests to the priest Amaziah: "I was no prophet. The Lord took me and said 'Go prophesy.'" Amos was happy in his old job, tending his flocks, pruning his sycamore trees. He didn't ask for this job! Amaziah tells him to leave Bethel and go back to Judah. Amos is the bearer of bad news. His name gives it away: In Hebrew, 'Amos'

means 'burden.' Amos' prophecy was a burden for Israel. This was a time of peace and prosperity for Israel. Life was good and many people grew lax in their faith. The worship of God turned to worship of themselves. They thought God was rewarding them for their fidelity. But the privileged few ignored the working class and the poor among them. Amos cries out for justice. Amos was rejected, but he continued; he shook the dust from his feet and walked on. He had a message from God and it had to be heard. He embodies what the psalmist sings: "Truth shall spring out of the earth." The disciples would have remembered the story of Amos. Would the apostles be thrown out like the prophet? They really didn't feel prepared for all of this, but they trusted the Lord.

The disciples would learn on the road what we all learn when we're beginning some new work: we learn so much while on the job. Many of the Jesuit deacons tell me, just before graduation, that they don't feel fully prepared for their ministry. I tell them that's good – that's smart. Does a surgeon feel fully prepared before his first surgery, or a lawyer before her first trial, or a teacher before the first class, a policeman on his first patrol? If we're smart we won't feel fully prepared. We know there's so much we don't know. And knowing this, keeps us sharp – alert, attentive – we learn on the job.

And for the disciples there's more. It's not just what they bring to others, but what they receive in turn. In their ministry they met the Lord. I've mentioned before of a scene at San Quentin prison. Some of my students were making their weekly visit with a group of inmates. While walking through the security gates they were greeted by a few evangelical ministers who said to them: "Isn't it great that we can bring Jesus to these convicts." My students told me later that this surprised them. They didn't think that they were bringing the Lord to these men, but that this is where they found the Lord. Like in the final judgment scene when Jesus says: "When I was in prison you visited me." The disciples carried very little with them because they were going to pick up much along the way.

When I was getting ready to move to California, my superior told me: "Most of us think of what we will bring to where we are going. That's good. But we should also ask 'What does the Lord have waiting for me there?'" I tend to imagine all those scenes for which I will not be prepared. So it's reassuring to know that the Lord has people and opportunities waiting for us that will fill us more than we know. I need to remember that the Lord is my bread.

I've learned that from preaching here. I've tried to be well prepared: reflecting on the scripture, researching the scholars, then writing and re-writing, and finally rehearsing the homily out loud, with gestures. But a preacher is never ready until s/he stands in the pulpit and faces the people. And to stand here on so many Sundays, and to have many of you watching and listening attentively, is both an honor and very humbling. As one pastor told me long time ago, when I was a very nervous deacon preparing to preach, "Tom, they take it from you!" That's what I have found here. With some of your feedback after my preaching, I'd swear that you heard it better than I preached it. (I wish I had said that!) In our ministry, we follow the path of the Lord, find people along the way who pull from us more than we knew we had. That's why we travel lightly and let the Lord be our bread.

I am happy to say that this story ends well for the disciples. Next week we'll hear how they

return and are eager to tell Jesus all that they had done and taught. Their preaching was heard and they were able to heal some people of their sin and sickness. Jesus welcomes them back and suggests they all get away to some deserted place and rest. But because the disciples were so successful, a crowd follows them – a huge crowd of five thousand people. Because of the disciples' work, they came to meet Jesus for themselves, to hear him and to be healed by him. So many came and – you remember – there wasn't enough to feed them, just five loaves and two fish. But Jesus fed them and filled them; it was more than enough. Jesus became their bread. Amen.

*Thomas Scirghi, S.J.*