

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year B

Fifteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time

First reading: (Amos 7. 12-15)

The Unwilling Messenger

Amos had a tricky task on his hands. He was sent unwillingly by God from the neighbouring kingdom of Judah to tell their bitter rivals in Israel to change their ways, to stop exploiting the poor and the weak, to bring sacrifices which were a real expression of homage to God who champions the needy and the powerless. No surprise that he was booted out of the national shrine and told to shove off home and mind his own business.

We don't like prophets who try to shake us out of our comfortable ways, pointing out our inadequacies, challenging us to be true to God's plans for us. In vain, Amos insisted that he was not a professional troublemaker, that all he had wanted was a quiet life looking after his flocks and herds and sycamore trees. And then the Lord had insisted on giving him this special task.

The exciting thing about being a Christian is that we never know when we will be called by the Lord to do some special task, great or small - even if it is only welcoming the unexpected and tiresome visitor and remembering that he or she is in the place of Christ.

Question:

If a prophet came today, what would he (or she) have to say about God's will for our society?

Second reading: (Ephesians 1.3-14)

The Cosmic Plan of God

Today we start reading the great letter to the Ephesians, the first of seven Sunday readings. Many scholars think that it was written not by Paul himself, but by a follower steeped in Paul's thought. Gone are the old problems of Jew and gentile. Reflections are on a cosmic scale, and Christ is evaluated in terms of the cosmic powers.

The Letter is quite different in style and develops many of Paul's ideas. Perhaps it is the first commentary on Paul. The sevenfold blessing with which it begins sums up God's plan of salvation for humanity.

The climax is in the centre, 'to bring everything under Christ as head'. Christ is the Wisdom of God, the plan according to which and through which all things were created. Christ is also the completion of the creation, and the unity of all things in Christ is a special emphasis of the Letter. All things are under Christ as head creation, all nourishment for creation and all guidance of creation. These are the functions that a head performs for a body, which Christ performs for creation.

Question:

What is meant by saying that everything is summed up or brought to a head in Christ?

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Gospel:

(Mark 6. 7-13)

Instructions for Missioners

The instructions for missioners are shaped by the urgency of the Kingdom. They are to travel light for speed. They should wear sandals rather than go barefoot, also for speed and security. They are to rely for their provisions on the welcome they receive, and if they are unwelcome, they should not waste time on those who reject them.

Did Jesus think that the Kingdom or Kingship of God would finally burst on the world in his own time, that there was so little time to spare? In one way, it did - at his death and Resurrection, which fulfilled God's plan and restored us to friendship with God. In another way, it is still in the future: the reign of peace and justice is not yet established. There is still sorrow, distress, enmity, fraud, jealousy and plenty of other evils that fracture God's Kingship. We are still imperfect reflections of the light of Christ, still pilgrim members of a pilgrim Church. Our efforts are feeble, even in Christ's footsteps. We cannot sit back complacently, any more than the missioners of Jesus' own time, and the task of establishing the Kingdom is still imminent.

Question:

How can missioners best bring Christ's light and God's joy to the world?
