

From The Pastor

The readings this weekend are a good expression of what it means to follow the Christian life. Inclusively, the readings express what we have received from God as gift and how we might put the gifts of God in action in our lives.

To paraphrase a quote attributed to Mother Theresa, 'we are not so much called to be successful as Christians, but to be faithful'. Amos, the prophet of the first reading is exactly that. Amos is a humble, uneducated shepherd, and dresser of sycamore trees. He had no ambitions to make a name for himself, nor was he particularly interested in leaving what he was doing. What Amos did have is an open heart for God. It is clear that Amos was a man of prayer. If he were not a person of prayer he would not have heard God's call, nor said yes to what he heard.

As a man of justice, Amos heard God's call and obeyed, despite the interruption it was to his life. This is putting into action what we know and believe, and what we have received from God. Leaving his familiar countryside, Amos travels to the Northern Kingdom of Israel and speaks in the temple what he has heard from the Lord. It was a difficult message of justice and trust in the ways of God; a call to stop using God as a source of income at the temple or manipulate the ways of God for a human purpose. As you might appreciate, the message was not well received. It was a time of relative peace and prosperity at the national temple of Bethel and the temple priests wanted nothing to do with the prophetic truth Amos had to speak. He is rejected and told to take his message elsewhere.

Amos stands his ground and makes clear that he is not a prophet for personal gain, as in the guild of prophets, but one who is motivated only by the word of God alone. Amos reveals our call to faith to know the truths of God and live them with courage and honesty despite rejection or persecution.

In letter to the Ephesians, Paul gives voice to our identity in Christ, and all we have received by the gracious will and desire of God. More than and prior to Church religion, Paul confirms the unsolicited initiative of God on our behalf. This prayer of blessing and thanksgiving reveals the plan of God for us who now stand in Christ through faith.

Several points made by St. Paul build the foundation upon which we stand as followers of Christ, who is God's gift to us. This Christ-centered prayer praises the Father of Jesus who has given us in Christ every spiritual blessing in the heavens. What is this blessing? It is nothing less than our invitation, in fact our call, to share the divine life of God through gift of the Son. This is God's plan from the beginning. It is a plan that is rooted in love and one that pleased God to give to us. It is God's pleasure that we praise him for the gift of his own life that he has given us in his Son. Why would we not want to praise and thank God for so gracious a gift?

How is all this union and life with God to be accomplished? 'It is in Christ and through his blood that we have been redeemed and our sins forgiven, so immeasurably generous is God's favor to us'. God himself accomplishes this union by his own doing. It is all gift. It is a gift we will come to know and understand more and more fully through our faith in Jesus. This faith has been sealed in us by the action of the Holy Spirit who empowers us to understand the mystery we share in Christ when we center our lives in love.

What does all this say? We are loved. We exist to be loved by God, and we exist to make known God's glory. What is God's glory? Jesus is the glory of God because he makes known, and makes visible all the hidden goodness, truth, and light that God is. In Christ we come to know God and live in the divine way. To emphasize the point, it is all gift. God is not looking for some pay back, or offering extra blessings for good behavior. It is God's pleasure to love you and me, and God wants nothing more than for us to know and share the fullness of the Divine Self.

With this gift of forgiveness and truth of redemption, the early disciples of Jesus are sent forth to share the Good News. This is the first and most natural action of those who know and accept the power of the Christian gospel. This is not just a personal message of personal salvation. This is the Good News and salvation for all God's people, and in claiming our identity we are compelled to share the news with others.

We have the authority to do this because we have Christ. Grounded in the faith we profess, we can stand secure in what we believe about God in Christ and freely share Him with others. As the gospel points out, we do not need a fine suit of clothes, lots of money, the latest communication devices, or any other special props to help us. Why? Because if we know with joy and surety the Lord Jesus in our hearts, and believe in the love God has for us, no other human props will be of greater value. At times, we can expect great success, while at other times we will experience rejection and confusion. Should this be the case, we can be confident of God's love and care and simply go forward. This is the core of the Christian life. You are loved beyond your wildest imagination. It is God's total and free gift, and all you have to do is accept it, and joyfully share it with others. What a blessing indeed!

Father John Esper