15th Sunday In Ordinary Time - B (2021)

 The story is told about the 3 soldiers, towards the end of the 2nd World War, when the German army were retreating & the allied forces entered a badly battered Italian Village, in a very remote town & very conservative Catholic community. The 3 soldiers were starved to hunger & decided to go down the village and ask food from the people. One of them, a Catholic soldier, went & came back with a bagful of goodies. The soldier relates: “*I just told them, I have a friend who is a priest & another friend who is a nun*.” Then the 2nd soldier, who was also a Catholic said, “*I think I can get more.*” Then coming back the 2nd soldier get 1 sack of food. He said, “*I told them my brother is a priest & my sister is a nun.*” Then, the 3rd soldier, who was a Protestant bragged & said, “*I am sure, I can get more.*” Upon coming back, he received a black eye & was badly bruised. So, the 2 soldiers chorused asking what happen. Then the 3rd soldier said, “*I don’t know, I just told them my father was a priest & my mother was a nun.*”

 That funny story might well illustrate that many times, we hear that priests & nuns are used as butts for jokes & anecdotes. And even the task of spreading the gospel. Unfortunately, many still have the idea that the call of Christ-mission is addressed only to the apostles & their successors: Bishops, priests & the religious

 We have been reflecting: On Preaching & Living the Word of God.

 In the 1st reading, from Amos, we see that the preaching ministry of a prophet, like Amos does not originate from oneself; nor from one’s choice of profession or career. Amos started preaching because God has chosen him & has sent him, even to territories beyond his own. Amos by profession was a shepherd and a farmer.

 So, there is no preaching ministry that does not originate from God. But for only someone who has been chosen by God will hopefully preach God’s Word & not one’s own word.

 In the 2nd reading, St. Paul writing to the Ephesians, presents to us the message of the preaching. And it is centered on Jesus Christ, the one who shed His blood for us on the cross & who also rose from the dead. And in whom, we have the graciousness of God, all the spiritual blessings coming to us, our calling to be holy, our predestination to belong to Christ, & the hope that, we will reach eternal salvation.

 So, the message of the preacher, for the apostle is Jesus, no other than that. We should not depart from that message & our lives must be patterned after the message.

 In the Gospel, we have a blending of the message & living out the message. Jesus summons the 12 & sends them on a mission. You see, the 12 did not go on their own. They have to be sent by Jesus, just like Amos in the 1st reading & just like St. Paul, who was chosen by God.

 The 12 must be summoned by Christ. And they had to preach the necessity for repentance. They had to call the people, reminding them the dawning of the Kingdom of God. The response is to repent, to turn away from sins & to choose to be belong to the Kingdom of God.

 But Jesus also wants them to accompany in their preaching with signs, with actions like expelling demons, anointing the sacred oil & curing illnesses.

 Jesus made sure that they knew from whose authority they are to preach & to perform those miraculous actions, but from Jesus’ authority, not their authority. The authority that comes from the Father & the Spirit, now entrusted to them by Jesus Christ.

 And 2ndly, Jesus also gives them some sort of a lifestyle check when they preach about the Kingdom of God. And what is the lifestyle check?

 They should not bring food in traveling, bag & money in their purses, why? Well, they should bring only the most important, the message of the Kingdom of God, the Gospel & the authority of God in the message & in the healing.

 For sometimes, we get too dependent on our gadgets. And we do not exhibit anymore our dependence on God, whom we are preaching about; & the God, who has authorize us to preach.

 The only things Jesus allowed them to bring were a walking stick & sandals, so that they could go on the mission, helping people then walk & go.

 Another part of the lifestyle is to eat what is being served to you. Do not seek comfort. If there is hospitality, appreciate it but expect also rejection. You are there not on a tour, not on recreation or vacation. You are there on a mission & show them that whether you are accepted or not, you are committed to preach the Word of God.

 This a good message for all of us, who participate in the prophetic role of Christ, all the baptized. We are to preach. Parents must preach & share their faith to their children. Teachers must preach & walk what they talk. Young people must preach to their peers but not only in words, but also through your lives by living out the Christian values.

 Kindly, continue your prayer & reflections, with the help of these points: The 1st question is: *How can we develop consistency between our message & lifestyle?* The 2nd question is: *How can we maintain the focus of our preaching on Jesus & His Kingdom?*