

## FIFTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – B

READING I Am 7:12-15

READING II Eph 1:3-14

GOSPEL Mk 6:7-13

Around the year 760 B.C., Amos, a southerner, arrived at Bethel, one of the most prestigious sanctuaries of the northern kingdom. It was a time of great prosperity but unfortunately it was largely in the hands of the wealthy few. Amos correctly read this situation as violation of covenant. The poor man was sold for a pair of sandals (2:6) while the rich drank wine from basins and feasted on the choicest meat (6:4, 6). Amos' dire message is best summed up by the following: The end has come for God's people (8:1). Amaziah, the government's spokesperson, adopted the party line. Amos' preaching was upsetting the country, and Amaziah told the prophet: "Yankee, go home!" Amos' reply was a brief summary of his vocation. In the past he had not been a prophet, nor had he belonged to the prophetic guilds. He had lived a rustic life in Tekoa. But one day God constrained him ("took ...and... said"). To adopt the party line would be to reject his prophetic vocation.

The author of Ephesians is disputed. Some claim it was Paul at a more mature point in his thinking or that was Paul making use of a secretary (a somewhat free hand would explain differences in vocabulary, style, and doctrinal emphasis). Others maintain that it is someone else: A disciple. If Paul is the author, the letter was probably written from Rome during Paul's house arrest there (61-63 A.D.).

The author of the letter begins with a hymn. He praises the Father for inaugurating the great plan of salvation which begins in heaven and comes to earth. Election is a key word. From the beginning God chose his people not by accident, but by design. Such election is to prompt genuine Christian living. Precisely as children who understand the Father's plan, we are empowered to offer praise. Election, moreover, is liberation. We have been set free by Christ's self-giving. Furthermore, God has called us to his council chambers. We have become privy to his mystery: His plans of salvation, and a share in his deliberations. That plan is to offer hope to a divided and splintered world, thereby creating a unity out of chaos. A final note is the Holy Spirit, the guarantee (first payment) that God will bring his plan to fulfillment. Praise, therefore, is the only fitting response.

The Mission Charge of Mark envisions future missionary work outside Palestine. Such missionary work is an extension of Jesus' own teaching mission. Just as Mark earlier linked rejection of Jesus with the call of the Twelve, he now connects the rejection at Nazareth with the mission of the Twelve (see 3:6, 13-19; 6:1-6). There is a clear note of urgency in this charge. The Twelve are to rely on God for their needs. A missionary who provides for every possible emergency can hardly preach the nearness of the kingdom:

They are not to seek the best accommodations. Their sole proclamation is total conversion, a complete and radical reorientation ("repentance"). Their expelling of demons continues Jesus' victory over Satan; therefore, Jesus' mission continues in them. With a note of realism, Mark mentions the act to be followed when they are rejected. Namely, shaking off the dust from their feet, the removal of the last vestige of contact with a heathen environment.

God chooses to need people. We confess the omnipotence of our God and conclude that God cannot need us. We acknowledge our limitations and maintain that God cannot use us for the kingdom. We profess our sinfulness and reason that God cannot employ us for others. We fail to realize that our God is a God who chooses to interact with his people through his people. God chooses to need people.

In the Amos story, God chooses to need a person who has become aware of the injustices among the Israelites. He fearlessly proclaims to the power structure that the Israelite poor are God's people and not simply a pair of sandals to be bought and sold. Amos' awareness leads to the condemnation of the kingdom, and condemnation of the kingdom leads to his expulsion. Though he appeared to be merely a shepherd/farmer from Tekoa, God needed him for that moment. God chooses to need people.

According to Ephesians, God calls people to be members of his council: His confidants who share in his decision making. This implies exposure to God's way of doing things and composure in the face of trial. To accomplish his plan of salvation, God must share it with his people. In Ephesians, God chooses to need people.

According to Mark, God chooses to need missionaries. Such people become charged with a sense of urgency. They continue the mission of Jesus. Their task is to proclaim radical and complete reorientation of life. They have been touched by Jesus, they have been needed, and so they must proclaim. In Mark, God chooses to need people.

Husbands and wives announce God's ongoing love for his people through their mutual love, are needed for the kingdom. People involved in justice and peace movements proclaim the supremacy of understanding over violence, are needed for the kingdom. All in the work force who communicate the priority of service over personal gain, are needed for the kingdom. Sinners who are reconciled to Christ and the community and preach the reality of forgiveness, are needed for the kingdom. All such people share the belief that God is so bound up with his people that he must interact with them for others. God chooses to need people.

Eucharist focuses on the need that the Father has of Jesus, even to the point of death. Eucharist urges the believing community to recognize their status as God's confidants. Eucharist moves the community into the world where they must interact with God for

others. Eucharist insists that God chooses to need people.