

Gratitude Foundation



*“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?
Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”*

(Lk. 17:15-17)

The Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time—Year B

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“In all things give thanks, it is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”

(1 Thess: 5:18)

Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading I

Amos 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

Psalm 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

Ephesians 1:3-14

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.

Alleluia

Cf. Ephesians 1:17-18

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

May the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ
enlighten the eyes of our hearts,
that we may know what is the hope that
belongs to our call.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Mark 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.

Exegesis

Amos 7:12-15

The Prophet Amos introduces himself in the first paragraph. He is from the town of Tekoa which was in the territory of Judah in the north on the border with Israel, the Northern Kingdom. He was active during the reign of King Uzziah of Judah (783-742) and King Jeroboam of Israel (786-746). This was a time between the “storms” of the Assyrian domination and the Babylonian Exile. It was a time of great material prosperity for both Israel and Judah. It was a time of a great divide, a growing separation between the wealthy and the poor. Amos warned against the mistreatment of one’s neighbor. Cultic worship was alive and well during this period, but Amos proclaimed that Yahweh was deeply concerned that the people were not practicing their religion and loving their neighbor as they were called to do. The people in turn rejected the words of the Prophet and in doing so were rejecting Yahweh (2:12; 7:12-13). Amos warned that rejecting the word of Yahweh was in fact rejecting His guiding word (8:11-12).

Immediately prior to our scripture passage today Amos has prophesied, “Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel shall surely be exiled from its land.” (Am 7:11). Amaziah was a priest of Bethel of Israel and reported this to King Jeroboam and then turned on Amos. Amos was a foreigner from Judah and Amaziah and Jeroboam now seek to oust the messenger.

In our pericope Amos is stating that he is not a traditional prophet following a lineage of prophets, but an ordinary shepherd chosen by God to share His message. His message was not a popular one. In fact, Amos is one of the prophets with the most negative and dire message. He warned of the wrath of God that would follow the moral degradation and infidelity that was rampant. Despite rejection Amos remained faithful to Yahweh, to his calling and to fulfilling the mission that was entrusted to him by Yahweh.

Psalm 85:9-10, 11-12, 13-14

Psalm 85 is entitled *Prayer for the Restoration of God’s Favor*. It can be broken down into three sections: Praise of Yahweh for past blessings, petitions for salvation, and the promise of God’s favor. Our pericope consists of the promise of the restored favor of God.

Whereas the people often, as Amos laments, refuse to listen to the Word of God, the psalmist proclaims, “I will hear what the Lord God speaks; He speaks of peace for His people and His faithful.” *His people* and *His faithful* imply a people now in right relationship with God and each other. *Peace*, or *shalom*, in the Hebrew/Aramaic describes this harmony with God and His creation. Salvation is for those who are loyal to God and to His commandments.

Merciful love and faithfulness unite in God. Merciful love (*hesed*) and faithfulness (*emet*) meet in God because God is the source of both. John reveals to us that God is Love (*hesed Hb, agape Gk*) and that God is Truth (*emet Hb, alethia Gk*). *Hesed* speaks of a graciousness, kindness, loyalty, faithfulness, and infinite Love. It also implies a joint obligation and an inherent relationship. *Emet* describes firmness, immutability, trustworthiness, constancy, dependability, ultimate reality, and Truth. Together they describe God’s steadfast unchanging love.

The covenantal love and faithfulness described above implies relationship and mutual obligations. Therefore, justice is also necessary. To be in this right relationship with God and creation requires free choice. Free choice requires justice. Justice looks down from heaven.

Exegesis (Continued)

Ephesians 1:3-14

The *Book of Wisdom* proclaims that “God fashioned all things that they might have being.” (Wis 1:14). The Scripture then describes the wicked or those who lack wisdom as those who believe that life is a result of random chance, i.e., “For we were born by mere chance, and hereafter we shall be as though we had never been.” (Wis 2:2).

God assures us in Ephesians that He is the artisan of our being, and we are the result of His loving choice. God chose each one of us in Christ before the foundation of the world. Authentic love by its very nature is self-giving, it must be shared. It is God who makes that choice to share His life with each one of us. You are here because God wills it so.

Our salvation is also God’s choice. He chose to send His only Son into our world to redeem us. This also is a part of God’s perfect plan from the foundation of the world. The Messiah is not a divine contingency plan. As a loving parent knows that a child will make mistakes, God knew from the beginning of time that we would fall from His love. When the time was right, He planned to send His only Son into our world to redeem us, to deliver His love to us in a personal way. From the Cross, God is drawing all of creation to Himself. This is God’s plan, God’s choice.

God also chooses to give His Spirit to us. The same Spirit that He breathed into us in creation is continually given to us. This is God’s choice.

Our choice to accept God’s gifts is called faith or belief. Life and death lie before us. This is our choice.

Exegesis (Continued)

Mark 6:7-13

Jesus has just been rejected in His hometown synagogue in Nazareth (last Sunday's Gospel), and He was amazed at their lack of faith. Now He is moving on to surrounding towns and villages and He is sending His disciples ahead of Him two by two. He first calls or summons His disciples. He is choosing them and commissioning them for the task at hand, to preach, teach, drive out demons, and heal the sick. They are to begin as He did, i.e., preaching repentance, which is turning back to and reconnecting with God.

That first Easter Sunday evening the Risen Lord again called and sent His apostles. After breathing the Holy Spirit upon them He said, "As the Father has sent Me so I send you." In the same vein as that night the one who has been sent is now sending. The Greek word for *send* is *apostello* from which the English word *apostle* is derived. *Apostello* has a connotation of being sent as a dispatch or for a specific purpose, to accomplish the will of the sender.

The sender passes on His authority to those who are sent. The word for authority in the original Greek is *exousia*. This is a general word for "power" or "authority" and is often used for human authority (e.g., Matt 8:9). It is used to refer to supernatural forces in several ways. It is used in the constructions "power (*exousia*) of darkness" (Luke 22:53; Col 1:13) and "power (*exousia*) of Satan" (Acts 26:18), but these refer to power as an abstract quality, not to supernatural beings. However, in several passages (1 Cor 15:24; Eph 1:21; 6:12; Col 2:15; 1 Pet 3:22) "authorities" (*exousia*) refers in a generic way to supernatural beings, which Christ has overcome and against which Christians must struggle. The power that the apostles received to drive out demons and heal the sick comes from Jesus and is therefore divine authority. The staff or the walking stick is also a symbol of God's power in Sacred Scripture.

The story is one of hospitality and lack of hospitality, and of acceptance and rejection. The calling and the mission are to bring the Good News into the world. Acceptance or rejection remain the free choice of those who hear.

1. A. McGuire-Moushon, "[Divine Beings](#)," ed. Douglas Mangum et al., *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

Reflection

This weekend's readings remind us that we are all chosen by God. None of us chose to be born into this world, but here we are. I did not choose my parents or my family, but there they were. I did not wake up one day and say, "I want to be a priest." Yet here I am. I know that God loved each one of us into existence. I know that God wants to share His love and His life with each one of us. I know that God does not want a world without each of us. And I know God has a plan for each one of us. I discovered one day that God was choosing me to serve His people in the role of a priest in the Church that He founded through His only begotten Son, some 2,000 years ago. Hearing that call from God will always remain the most humbling experience of my life.

In today's first reading Amos says, "I was no prophet... I was a shepherd... and the Lord said to me, Go prophesy to my people Israel." Amos was called and sent by God. Our second reading today from the *Letter to the Ephesians* assures us that God chose each one of us for Himself, before the foundation of the world. Think about that for a second. Before God created the universe God had already chosen us. Now, God is calling us to himself. In and through Christ, God is drawing us and all of creation to Himself. In our Gospel today Jesus is calling and sending His apostles to go out and to proclaim the Good News.

Now God is calling and sending each one of us to go out and proclaim the Good News. It does not mean that He is calling us to leave everything behind and go to some distant missionary land, although He may be; God is calling each one of us to "bloom where we are planted." He is calling us to live our faith more intentionally in our families, our parishes and in our communities. We need to be that guiding light more than ever before in a world that is growing darker.

Jesus is the Light of the World. Christ's powerful abiding presence within and among us enlightens us and makes us a joyful and vibrant people of faith. All the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit are evident in the life of a vibrant Christian fully alive in Christ. The fire of the Holy Spirit inspires, and the light of Jesus leads and guides a Spirit filled person. The love, the joy, and the peace that Jesus gives must become visible in us to enlighten those around us. Jesus wants to draw others into the light of His Love through us.

Someone once gave me a t-shirt that says, "Catholicism is not a spectator sport." Now it is time for all of us to move from the bleachers to the playing field. It is time for all of us to discern what God is calling us to do for His Kingdom. I leave you with the words of Jesus to each of us at the Last Supper, "It was not you who chose Me, but I who chose you, to go and bear fruit that will last." Come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of us Your faithful and enkindle in us the fire of Your love. Amen.

Yours in Christ and the Holy Spirit,



Personal Witness

My maternal grandparents owned a small dairy farm in an extremely remote area of the county. The farm is situated on a beautiful property with rolling hills and has two separate rivers running through it. One river forms the northern boundary, and the second river borders the eastern. The two-story farmhouse and the barn were both built by my grandfather. The farmhouse and the barn were constructed about 300 yards apart positioned on the highest hill on the property and the highest elevation in the county. On this small subsistence farm my mother and her nine brothers were raised.

As a child I have many fond memories of life on the farm. My grandmother cooked on a wood stove and the kitchen was always filled with the aroma of fresh baked bread and other delights. The home was full of love and of faith. I enjoyed spending time on the farm with my grandparents. I worked on the farm and neighboring farms through my teenage years.

One of my earliest memories on the farm took place when I was seven years old. I was helping grandpa with the milking. My job was to distribute the oats and the hay to the cows while grandpa was doing his thing on the other end. As grandpa was finishing transferring the milk cans to the cooler, he sent me back to the house.

It was an extremely cold January evening. It was well below zero. The only visible lights were the dim glow coming from the barn and a little dim light coming from the farmhouse windows. About halfway to the house I recall coming to a complete stop. Standing in that extreme cold I felt frozen in time. In every direction 360 degrees at eye level all I could see were stars, billions, and billions of stars. It seemed as if I could reach out and touch them. It was the most breathtaking sky I had ever seen and have ever seen to this day. What I experienced at that moment I have always had difficulty finding words to describe. I felt the embrace and the warmth of God's love. I knew that God was real, that God loved me, and that God had a plan for my life. I remember feeling this profound connection with God and with the entire universe. I knew that I was a part of God's creation. I was overcome by the glory and the beauty and the immensity of God and of His universe. And at that moment I knew that I was an integral part of God and His creation. I knew that God did not want a universe without me. The touch of my grandfather's big hand grabbing mine brought me back to earth. I could smell the fresh baked bread as we neared the house.

Many times in my life I have returned to that place, physically and spiritually. It would be easy to feel lost or insignificant in the experience of spans of the universe. I think that many people often do. I did not. I felt a profound connection with God and with all that He created. I have always known where I came from and where I was going. I have often felt a little lost along the journey, but this foundational experience has always been my compass and my guiding light. Knowing that my life is not mere chance, gives me meaning and purpose, faith, and hope. Knowing that I am loved from the foundation of the universe fills me with life and with gratitude!

F. Glenn