

HOMILY FOR THE FIFTEENTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME
Sunday, 14 July 2024

Fr. Jim Fredericks

Part One: the readings for the day
Part Two: reflection on the readings
Part Three: guidelines for *lectio divina*

PART ONE: READINGS FOR THE DAY
Lectionary: 104

Reading I Am 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 Ps 85:9-10, 11-12, 13-14

R. 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 Eph 1:3-14 or 1:3-10

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. Eph 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 Mk 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.

PART TWO: HOMILY ON THE READINGS

The first reading, from the Book of the Prophet Amos, speaks forcefully to the Church here in the United States. We need to pay attention.

Things are heating up and Amos the prophet has to get out of Dodge in a hurry.

After the Kingdom of Israel split into the Northern and Southern kingdoms, Amos found himself in the North telling the king that the Lord God was not impressed by the king’s fancy liturgies and elaborate sacrifices. The God of Abraham demands justice for the little people of the land, not expensive ceremonies.

Amos’ message was not popular with the king and his rich cronies. As a rule, bigshots find prophets inconvenient.

So Amaziah, the king’s high priest, tells Amos he needs to leave town:

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."

Bethel is in the north. Judah is the southern kingdom.

Something similar is taking place in Nicaragua these days. Nicaragua's prophets are having a difficult time. President Ortega, the great Sandinista revolutionary, has become a dictator, running the country as a business for the benefit of himself and his pals. (There's a lot of Chinese money involved).

Student protesters at the Catholic university in Managua had to flee for their lives when Ortega's police showed up on their campus. The students took sanctuary in the local Catholic parish. The police then fired high-powered rifles through the walls of the church, defacing statues of the saints in the process. The pastor of the parish has refused to repair the statues. What Ortega has done to the saints, he is doing to the poor.

Three hundred students have been killed. The Catholic university has been shut down. The same is true of TV Merced, the television station of the Archdiocese of Managua. Numerous Catholic radio stations have been silenced as well.

There have been many expulsions. The nuncio (the Vatican's ambassador to Nicaragua) was expelled in 2022. Mother Theresa's sisters were kicked out after that. (Mr. Ortega charged the nuns with money laundering, financing terrorism and importing "weapons of mass destruction").

Several bishops have been expelled. Bishop Silvio Báez fled Nicaragua in 2019 after the US ambassador alerted him that the government had hired goons to kill him.

Bishop Báez and the Prophet Amos have something important in common. They both had to get out of Dodge for fear of their lives.

Here in the USA, we are fast approaching a presidential election. I'm afraid that our country has more than its fair share of religious leaders like Amaziah. America needs prophets. We have more than enough sycophants - religious or otherwise.

Even more importantly, America needs a Church which speaks the Good News with a prophet's voice. Curiously, Bishop Báez, who had to flee his native Nicaragua for his life, does not describe himself as a prophet. Instead, he sees himself as part of a prophetic Church.

In contrast, the Conference of Bishops here in the United States is drastically reducing its commitment to the poor and marginalized. The President of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, in an announcement that took our bishops by surprise, has announced that staffing for the Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development will be drastically reduced. There was no consultation about this.

Archbishop John Wester of Santa Fe is now publicly reminding his brother bishops that Jesus began his ministry by saying that he has come to "bring good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to the captives, sight to the blind, and to set free the oppressed."

The Archbishop also notes that solidarity with the poor has been the Church's mission since the beginning.

America desperately needs prophets. But even more so, it needs a prophetic Church ready to protect its prophets and willing to call attention to the justice the Lord demands of all nations... not just Nicaragua, but the United States as well.

PART THREE: INSTRUCTIONS FOR *LECTIO DIVINA*

I suggest that you use the readings and my reflections as an opportunity for practicing *lectio divina* ("divine reading"). This is an ancient spiritual practice that started with the great monks in the Syrian and Egyptian desert back in the early days of the Church. It is really quite simple.

Step one: calm your mind (my Buddhist friends describe the mind as “a mango-tree full of chattering monkeys”). I find that paying attention to your breath for a few minutes is a practical and effective way to do this.

Step two: read the readings slowly and attentively. Savor the words as if you were tasting a great Pinot Noir. Don't rush. You are not looking for information or instructions. You are making friends with a sacred text which will bless you abundantly if you will only open your heart to it and let it speak to you. In *lectio divina*, we are not actually “reading” the Bible. Rather, we are “listening” to the Bible as the sacred words speak to us.

Step three: repeat step two.

Step four: read the homily on the readings.

Step five: Ask yourself a few questions:

- What particular words in the readings call out to me most forcefully?
- What is going on in my life such that these words call to me so forthrightly?
- How am I being asked to change, both interiorly and exteriorly?
- In light of this *lectio divina*, how am I being invited to be of service to the world today?