

15th Sunday OT

Amos 7:12-15/ Mark 6:7-13

It is generally recognized that **Amos** was the first of the Israelite prophets whose words were assembled in a scroll, (that was their form of a book back then), although three others, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah were his near contemporaries.

He was a **herdsman** and dresser of sycamores. In Hebrew, herdsman means 'sheep-master' and refers to owners and managers of a special kind of dwarfed sheep famous for its wool. He may have been one of the more substantial men of his region. He also lived in a strategically located fortified walled village that had strong ties to Jerusalem administratively and defensively. A series of these fortified cities were built by Solomon.

Amos, the prophet, had a series of visions. One vision was a military invasion that would soon sweep through the land. In another vision Israel was likened to a basket of rotting fruit, ripe for destruction. But seldom was a prophet so out of step with his times. Not since the days of king David had Israel been as powerful or prosperous as right then. From archaeological evidence of the north-Galilean city of Hazor there was an **earthquake** which Amos mentions and that dates him to the year 760 BC, in the middle years of the long and exceptionally prosperous reigns of these kings of Israel and Judah.

Amos asked why Yahweh was allowing this to happen. Because there was **no justice nor uprightness** at the gate, where the elders usually held court. Also, the **elite were confident that Yahweh was with them** and that Yahweh, being who he is, would **one day act to bring them as a people to a position of unprecedented preeminence over all others**. But Amos called this complacent theology. He also abhorred the practices in the Northern Temple at Bethel against the solemn assemblies and its transparency because it distracts from doing what is really important, like letting justice flow like water and uprightness like a never-failing stream. In other words, their Liturgy was great but their Social Justice stunk!

Because Amos was from the Kingdom of Judah in the South, **he was sent** to the Kingdom of Israel in the North to prophesy by Yahweh, but they told him to shut-up and go back to the south where you belong and preach there!

In today's gospel, ***Jesus sends us out***, like his disciples, to preach the gospel through our good actions and words - to our families and friends and to our workplaces. We are also expected to speak out in his behalf when we see injustice against our neighbor. And there will be people who will tell us to shut-up, maybe even to go back where we came from.

After the elections in Kenya there was violence when I lived there at the time. The horrible news began to filter back through reputable witnesses of killings and revenge. One of our brothers came back with news from his home that the local catechist of his parish was killed simply because he was from another tribe. At the funeral, the ***Priest begged the people*** to remain calm and not seek vengeance. At one point he finally gave up. He removed his shoes and shook off the dust and got back in his car and left, refusing to continue with the burial. It is a wonder that they did not kill him.

How do we walk the fine balance between the commitments to our faith and to our country? It isn't easy, and ***without a serious prayer life*** and ***strong faith community*** one can almost predict where a person's commitment will be when political lines start to be drawn. The disciples in today's gospel were at the beginning of their first successful mission to the people of God. Today, the challenges to our faith are more subtle and difficult to discern let alone how to act. None-the-less, we are asked to go forward with the Lord and do the best we can.

We know what happened to the Northern Kingdom of Israel when it fell to Assyria in 721 BC, they disappeared but some were scattered, ***called the Diaspora***. We know what happened to the Southern Kingdom of Judah when it fell to the Babylonians in 587 BC, they disappeared, and some were scattered. We know what happened to Israel when it fell to the Romans in 70 AD, they were scattered. We do know Christianity survived and even spread, especially through the many examples of the witnesses who gave their lives for their faith.

We are blessed with a diverse and welcoming SFdS Faith Community where people come to worship not because it is the local parish but because they choose to come here from many zip codes to be part of this community. May the Lord continue to bless us and help us on our paths as we support each other during the good times and bad. May we allow ourselves to be sent by the Lord to whoever and wherever he chooses and may our Social Justice Programs thrive!!!