

**TWENTY-FIFTY SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
YEAR C SEPTEMBER 22, 2013**

THEME: The Prophet of God's Poor

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Most Sundays the inspiration for my homilies to you comes from the Gospel text and Jesus words or actions.

On occasion, however, it seems appropriate for us to be attentive to the other scriptural texts offered by the liturgy.

Today and next Sunday we are given readings from the Hebrew Scriptures in the Book of the Prophet Amos – only one other time in our three year cycle of reading do we ever hear from this prophet.

Because of the poignancy and continuing relevance of his message, I believe it is worth taking some time to dwell on this prophetic figure of our tradition.

Amos lived approximately 600 years before Jesus was born in the southern part of Israel.

His time was one of relative peace and prosperity, at least for a select portion of people – his society was seriously divided between the haves and the have nots.

This division particularly disturbed Amos and at some point he heard the voice of God calling him to go and speak truth to power about it.

One of the first things to note about Amos is what he noted to the High Priest of the Royal Temple who tried to refuse him the right to preach.

Amos said: I'm no professional prophet or priest.
I'm a layman!
I'm a sheep breeder and I care for fig-trees!
It was the Lord who sent me here to give this message.

And by the way, High Priest:

Your wife is about to become a prostitute in the city,
Your sons and daughters will be killed by war,
And you yourself will be carried off into slavery into a foreign land.

And that's the second observation about Amos, he didn't mince words: he was blunt and bold in ways sure to provoke and gain attention!

For example, he likely did not make any friends among the ladies at court when he railed:

**“You women of Samaria are [a bunch of] fat cows!
You mistreat and abuse the poor and the needy,
Then you say to your husbands, “Bring us another drink!”**

Of course we heard that same passion in today's reading too, didn't we:

**“Hear this, you who trample upon the needy
And destroy the poor of the land!
'When will the new moon be over,' you ask,
'that we may sell our grain,
And the Sabbath that we may display the wheat?’”**

The greedy, rich couldn't wait until the religious holidays were over so they could get back to cheating the poor and rigging their scales to their own financial benefit.

Wailed Amos: **“The Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob: never will I forget a thing they have done.”**

All in all the message of Amos is dark for he holds out little hope that the rich and prosperous will change and pay any attention to the poor and needy in their midst.

Amos offers few words of redemption and more of retribution.

For this prophet, the failure to care for the needs of the lowly and hurting is a basic failure of the people's covenant relationship with God:

“You, dearest Israel, have fallen, never to rise again – you lie deserted in your own land, with no one to help you up.”

The prophecies of Amos help form the bedrock of our Catholic social justice teaching which holds that care for the least among us, feeding the hungry, ministering to the sick and hurting, protecting the innocent and the exile, housing the homeless are all essential aspects of what it means to be a child of God and disciple of Jesus Christ.

As Amos could not be silent in the face of the inequality between rich and poor in his time neither can the disciple of Jesus today.

Just this past week the US Census Bureau announced that the inequality gap among us continues to expand.

After the 2008 recession wealthiest among have rebounded nicely as the stock market has grown to unprecedented heights.

Meanwhile the wages of those on the lowest end of the ladder have, to use the term of the media, “stagnated” -- that is gone nowhere.

Not even the federal minimum wage has been raised.

Here in our own state of West Virginia, a recent study with the interesting title of “The State of Working West Virginia 2013: from Weirton Steel to Wal-Mart” reported state’s wealth is concentrated in the wealthiest 10% to a degree not seen since 1916 – the era of the robber barons.

Conditions not unlike those of the time of the prophet Amos remain in our time.

Will God inspire new voices like his to speak truth to power?

Will disciples of Jesus be faithful to the foundation of justice he laid?

**“Hear this, you who trample upon the needy
And destroy the poor of the land!
The Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob:
never will I forget a thing they have done.”**