

## Homily for 15<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B

By Fr. Jerome Ituah, OCD

Readings: Amos 7:12-15; Ps 84(85); Eph 1:3-14; Mk 6:7-13

Theme: Credentials of a credible prophetic and apostolic ministry.

Last Sunday, we read about the call of Ezekiel and how God sent him as a prophet among the exiled Israelites. On the other hand, Jesus was rejected as a prophet by his own people. Today, Amos defends his prophetic ministry and, in the gospel, Jesus sends out his disciples. Amos was from the southern kingdom of Judah. However, he preached in the Northern Kingdom of Israel before the Assyrian exile in 722/721 B.C. His prophetic oracles were against the lifestyle of the people, their injustices, discrimination and oppression of the poor. In chapter 7, God showed Amos warning visions concerning the destruction of the kingdom by the Assyrians (cf. Amos 7:1-9). When Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, heard the words of Amos, he reported to the king that Amos was against the king, the land and the sanctuary of God.

In our reading, Amaziah tells Amos to go back to his land of Judah and prophesy there. Amaziah says to Amos, *chozeh lek* 'go O seer'. Calling Amos *chozeh*, a seer, was a derogatory way of Amaziah playing down the role of Amos as a *nabi*, a prophet. Hence Amos says to him, 'I was no prophet, neither did I belong to any of the brotherhoods of prophets', but it was the Lord who called him. Amaziah accuses Amos of prophesying against the *beth-mamlachah*, literally, 'the house of the kingdom', meaning the temple of the kingdom, where the king worships. Amos then presents his credential as a true prophet of God. He replies Amaziah that he was only a *boqer*, 'a herdsman' and looked after sycamore trees when God called him. Amos underscores that he had a profession, was not idle. Still, God called him from his profession for the prophetic ministry. What comes out clearly is that Amos' vocation was divinely given, not humanly driven as we may see today.

In the gospel, Jesus summoned his disciples and sent them out in pairs. He is the one who calls and sends. He gave them authority just as God called and gave Amos the mandate and authority. Jesus gives the disciples the instructions, which will constitute their credentials for carrying out the ministry. They are to live simple lives and depend solely on what is provided for them on the mission. They are to take nothing for the journey except a staff. Why were they to take a staff, *rhabdos* in Greek? *Rhabdos*, was a measuring stick or an instrument for punishment. It could also represent the shepherd's authority over his sheep, a ruler's authority, a walking stick for travellers, or support for older people. It is not clear why Jesus allows them to take a staff. It was probably to support them when they are weak or, even more importantly, to show that they have the authority of their shepherd, Jesus. But they were to take nothing else, no food. Whatever is presented to them should suffice. They were to rely on the people for their daily bread, not amassing enough bread for years to come. They are to take no bag not to be tempted to carry extra luggage to support themselves. They are to take no money. They were to have no money attached to their names to be weighed down by money, the root of all evils (1 Tim 6:10). Jesus demanded their absolute trust in God and wanted the disciples to be utterly free from any form of attachment to possessions.

Although Jesus chose them at the material time in history, God had predestined them to be part of his saving mission. St. Paul tells us that God 'had blessed us with all the spiritual blessings of heaven in Christ. Before the world was made, he chose us, chose us in Christ, to be holy and spotless, and to live through love in his presence.' We, too, have been chosen by God to be part of his prophetic and apostolic ministry in our time. In baptism and confirmation, God conferred his graces on us and filled us with his spirit. Let us not be afraid to use the blessings we have received in Christ as ambassadors in our families, places of work or wherever we find ourselves.