

Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year B



FIRST READING
Amos 7:12–15

PSALM
Psalm 85:9–14

SECOND READING
Ephesians 1:3–14

GOSPEL
Mark 6:7–13

*Scripture quotations from
New Revised Standard Version Bible:
Catholic Edition, © 1989, 1993.
Used with permission.*

PRAYER

Psalm 85:9–14

Let me hear
what God the LORD will speak,
for he will speak peace to his people,
to his faithful, to those
who turn to him in their hearts.
Surely his salvation is at hand
for those who fear him,
that his glory may dwell in our land.
Steadfast love and faithfulness
will meet;
righteousness and peace
will kiss each other.
Faithfulness
will spring up from the ground,
and righteousness
will look down from the sky.
The LORD will give what is good,
and our land will yield its increase.
Righteousness will go before him,
and will make a path for his steps.

READING THE WORD

First Reading Amos 7:12–15

Amaziah said to Amos, “O seer, go,
flee away to the land of Judah, earn
your bread there, and prophesy
there; but never again prophesy at
Bethel, for it is the king’s sanctuary,
and it is a temple of the kingdom.”
Then Amos answered Amaziah,

“I am no prophet, nor a prophet’s
son; but I am a herdsman, and a
dresser of sycamore trees, and the
LORD took me from following the
flock, and the LORD said to me, ‘Go,
prophesy to my people Israel.’”

Second Reading 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
heavenly places, just as he chose
us in Christ before the founda-
tion of the world to be holy and
blameless before him in love. He
destined us for adoption as his
children through Jesus Christ, ac-
cording to the good pleasure of his
will, to the praise of his glorious
grace that he freely bestowed on
us in the Beloved.

In him we have redemption
through his blood, the forgiveness
of our trespasses, according to the
riches of his grace that he lavished
on us. With all wisdom and in-
sight he has made known to us the
mystery of his will, according to
his good pleasure that he set forth
in Christ, as a plan for the fullness
of time, to gather up all things in
him, things in heaven and things
on earth.

In Christ we have also obtained an
inheritance, having been destined

according to the purpose of him
who accomplishes all things ac-
cording to his counsel and will, so
that we, who were the first to set
our hope on Christ, might live for
the praise of his glory. In him
you also, when you had heard the
word of truth, the gospel of your
salvation, and had believed in
him, were marked with the seal
of the promised Holy Spirit; this
is the pledge of our inheritance
toward redemption as God’s own
people, to the praise of his glory.

Gospel Mark 6:7–13

Jesus called the twelve and began
to send them out two by two, and
gave them authority over the un-
clean spirits. He ordered them to
take nothing for their journey ex-
cept a staff; no bread, no bag, no
money in their belts; but to wear
sandals and not to put on two tu-
nics. He said to them, “Wherev-
er you enter a house, stay there
until you leave the place. If any
place will not welcome you and
they refuse to hear you, as you
leave, shake off the dust that is on
your feet as a testimony against
them.” So they went out and pro-
claimed that all should repent.
They cast out many demons, and
anointed with oil many who were
sick and cured them.

HEARING THE WORD

“Amazing Transformations”

Journeying through the ordinary time of the liturgical year, may cause some Christians to lose sight of life's extraordinary character. Today's liturgy helps believers to maintain a keen awareness of the extraordinary character of their existence, which is full of potential and an exhilarating future.

The first reading must be read in its historical context of the divided kingdom. The southern kingdom of Judah, with its capital in Jerusalem, was ruled by the descendants of king David and was considered as legitimate and loyal to God. The northern kingdom, Israel, had its capital in Samaria, and was ruled by non-Davidic kings, who were not considered legitimate rulers. In the North, God was worshiped in numerous sanctuaries, scattered throughout the land, with Bethel as one of the most important ones. Amos, a prophet from Judah was sent by God to the North, to denounce the widespread violations of the covenant and God's law, by the northern kings and leaders, especially in the area of social justice. Like his contemporary, Hosea, Amos' mission was to denounce the wrongdoings of the north and call for repentance.

Our reading describes the confrontation between Amos and Amaziah. The

latter was the chief priest in the shrine at Bethel. He represented and served the king of the north. As a royal servant and priest, he had royal authority and power behind him. His main function was to protect the king's interests, and to manage the sanctuary in the king's name. In contrast, Amos was a humble shepherd and a forester. He neither chose, nor aspired, to be a prophet. He had no background or credentials that would warrant such a noble calling. The sole source of his prophetic authority and mission was God's commission, which turned this simple shepherd into God's mouthpiece. Relying on the royal authority, Amaziah ordered Amos to get out of the northern kingdom, and forbade him to speak at Bethel. Amos responded pointing to his prophetic authority, which came directly from God. With God's authority behind him, Amos dared to confront the entire northern kingdom with its king and chief priest. The amazing transformation that took place in Amos life could happen only through God's intervention. God did intervene, transforming a simple shepherd into God's imposing and powerful messenger.

Unlike most NT letters, Ephesians does not begin with commendation and praise of the addressees. Instead, the author chooses to open this letter with an elaborate thanksgiving to God. In it, he recognizes and expresses gratitude for “every spiritual blessing” that God bestowed on

believers. First, God elected them to be holy and blameless, to be truly God's own people. This state of holiness and blamelessness was not the reason but the purpose for which they were chosen. This purpose was achieved by Christ, who redeemed and sanctified them through his blood. Reconciled to God in this manner, believers have a splendid future. The author writes about the great mystery which has been revealed to them. This mystery is God's intent “to gather up all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth”. This highly theological concept means that all of history, and all beings in the universe, will be brought together in Christ. The author implies that Christ will become the supreme authority over all creation, and all things will exist in a harmonious union with God through Christ. This union is the Christians' definitive vocation, their exhilarating future.

The author concludes by highlighting the great dignity of the believers, based on this vocation. Because of what Christ did for them, the believers now have the “inheritance” - their eternal destiny to share in God's glory. They already possess this inheritance if they live in accordance with the gospel, and place themselves under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The believers are like heavenly beings living on earth, but moving towards their heavenly home. Not long before, the Ephesians were pagans who worshiped stone statues and lived a

debauched life. Now, these very individuals are God's elect, destined for eternal glory. Truly an amazing transformation has taken place, one that was in accordance with God's design and accomplished through Christ's salvific work.

Jesus' closest followers, the twelve, were low-class Galilean Jews who led very ordinary lives. Several of them were fishermen. There was nothing extraordinary that distinguished them from the rest of the population. The Gospels say nothing about the reasons why Jesus chose these individuals rather than others. Today's Gospel portrays the remarkable transformation that these men underwent. Up to this point in the story, Jesus alone performed all the significant acts - he exorcises demons, heals, and proclaims the good news. But in today's account Jesus bestows his authority on these ordinary Galileans, mandating them to do exactly what he has been doing. They are to exorcise demons as a proof that God's power operates in the world. They are to travel without any provisions showing that their ministry is not profit-oriented but God-sustained. Like Jesus in Nazareth, they should expect rejection. If this should happen, they are symbolically to "shake off the dust from their feet". Every pious Jew, returning from the Gentile lands, was supposed to do just that, to prevent any uncleanness from entering the Holy Land. By this symbolic act, the disciples were to indicate that those who reject-

ed the good news rejected God, and became like the Gentiles. Remarkably, these ordinary men carried out God's saving work successfully, and became like Jesus in their ministry. They have been transformed, from simple fisherman and workmen, into God's emissaries and delegates for Jesus.

Today's readings contain stories of remarkable transformations. Amos, a shepherd and a forester from Tekoa, became an imposing prophet who confronted a royal priest and declared God's judgment upon the powerful kingdom of Israel. Groups of pagan Ephesian Gentiles living in idolatry and immorality were, by God's eternal choice and grace, drawn to join the Christian communities. By accepting Jesus in faith, they were transformed into God's people destined for eternal glory and for union with Christ in eternity. A few Galilean fisherman and workmen were chosen to become God's agents, wielding God's power and performing mighty acts. Like Jesus, they were to bring God's kingdom and salvation into the world. These stories demonstrate how God transforms the everyday existence of ordinary human beings, into a remarkable and extraordinary life. Those so transformed by God, become the channels of God's grace, and the servants carrying out God's designs for salvation. Such transformed lives serve the purpose so aptly defined by the Psalmist in the words, "so that God's glory may dwell in our land."

LISTENING TO THE WORD OF GOD

This Sunday's liturgy presents us with amazing examples of transformation also showing that our ordinary life is under the constant transforming power of God, even if we do not realize it. The readings invite us to pay keen attention to the rhythm of our life and recognize God's intervention and its effect in our life.

Today's good news is the assurance that God transforms us from our lowly state to becoming his agents. The first reading shows how God transformed Amos from a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore trees to a great prophet. Amos humbled himself and acknowledged his lowly state. His acknowledgment and openness became the starting point for God's action in him. His honesty, humility and openness earned him God's favour. As it was for Amos, so for us, when we walk humbly and honestly before the Lord, we make it possible for God to intervene in our lives, and to effect a transformation that will make us his own. He in fact does just this daily in our ordinary lives; his transforming grace is always available for us. Even this ordinary Sunday presents us with possibility of transformation when we hear what the Lord God speaks to us in the liturgy.

Today's readings also remind us that our transformation began at the foundation of the world. God has blessed us in Christ

with every spiritual blessing, and desires that we remain holy and blameless in his sight. The greatest transformation we have attained is the redemption through Christ's blood, resulting in the forgiveness of our sins. God intervened to effect our redemption out of his immense love for us. He removed the disgrace of sin, that would otherwise have kept us in despair. Through his Son, he transformed us from our sinful state, to a state that makes us worthy to stand before him and become his representatives. This redemption sets us on a journey towards our heavenly home. As we continue on this journey, we need to ensure that this transformation is wholistic. All our actions are to be in line with the transformation we have received. The way we live in our families, behave at work places, relate with our neighbours, gather in our small Christian communities, should communicate a life that is under God's transforming hand.

Finally, the Gospel presents to us ordinary fishermen, remarkably transformed to become God's instruments. This transformation enables them to do what Jesus himself has been doing. If Jesus chose them, he also chooses us. Like them we are ordinary people. Like them we trust him. Therefore, Jesus chooses us today, and is ready to empower us to continue his mission. We are invited to shake off the dust that hinders us from responding to his voice, the dust that pollutes us. Often, if they are not root-

ed in Christ, our behaviour, attitudes, attractions, ambitions can pollute and burden us. God's transformation requires our openness to hear what Jesus speaks and respond to his voice.

Our transformation can be unique and real. God transforms our ordinary life to a state worthy of himself. He redeems us and makes us his own. When our transformation is complete, God empowers and gives us authority over unclean spirits, thus becoming a means to bring about his kingdom. Let us set our hope on Christ, the agent of transformation, so that our life can reflect the glory of God on our land. Great things happen when God mixes with us!

PROVERB

“Wood already touched by fire is not hard to set alight.”

ACTION

Self-examination:

How has God transformed my life? What moments can I point out as marks of God's transformation in my life? What spiritual blessings have I received from God? Do I have anything that is polluting me? How can I shake it off?

Response to God:

My prayer during this week will be that of thanksgiving for God's intervention in my life. I will thank him daily for his enduring hand and blessings in my life.

Response to your World:

During this week I will focus on identifying the spiritual blessings bestowed on me by God. I will use those blessing to bring about the increase of goodness in my environment.

As a group, we will organise a faith-sharing session. We will share with one another the transforming experiences we have had in our lives.

PRAYER

*God our Father,
we thank you
for your unceasing initiative
and intervention in our lives.
Help us to respond to your call
and be open to the transformation
that you bring to us.
Direct our thoughts
and actions, we pray,
to reflect your glory on earth.
We ask this
through our Lord Jesus Christ
your son,
who lives and reigns
with you and the Holy Spirit
one God forever and ever.
Amen.*