

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle C

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

1st Reading - Amos 6:1a, 4-7

Again this week we hear from the first of the written prophets – his work having been recorded in the early to mid eighth century B.C. By trade, Amos was a herdsman and dresser of figs (whose job it was to puncture the immature fruit to make it turn sweet). In other words, he was an itinerant farm worker who spent some time away from his native Tekoa (which is too high in altitude to support the growth of figs). Amos' career took place during a period of great material prosperity for Israel, but also a period of social and religious corruption. Politically, it was the calm between storms – the eye of the hurricane so to speak – during the second half of the 9th century B.C. Israel had felt the military might of Assyria; after this, the Assyrian power in the area weakened. But in 721 B.C., Samaria [the capital of the northern kingdom (Israel)] fell to the Assyrians.

Although Amos never refers directly to the Sinai covenant, this concept lies at the heart of his message of judgment. Yahweh had acknowledged Israel as his covenant people, but they had abused this privilege. Therefore, Israel would experience the curses associated with disobedience of the covenant. Amos' harsh words were directed in a particular way against the leadership – king, priests, and upper classes – but the coming judgment would affect the entire people because Israelite thought is that the nation is a unity with a common destiny.

6:1a Woe to the complacent in Zion[!]

Zion is Jerusalem. This has caused some commentators to speculate that this verse is a later addition since Amos' ministry was to Israel and not Judah – but prophets held on to the ancient vision of a united kingdom and did not feel that their words were necessarily restricted to Israel of Judah.

⁴ Lying upon beds of ivory, stretched comfortably on their couches,

They made use of very elaborate furniture, inlaid with ivory panels, and they ate sumptuous food. The remains of a bed inlaid with ivory have been found at the site of Arslan Tash in northern Syria – one of the pieces bore the name of Hazael, king of Damascus (ca. 842-815 B.C.).

They eat lambs taken from the flock, and calves from the stall!

Veal – milk fed beef which is very tender and sweet.

5 Improvising to the music of the harp, like David, they devise their own accompaniment.

Musical entertainment was provided at meals. David became proverbial for his musical skills – reference to him here may be irony.

6 They drink wine from bowls and anoint themselves with the best oils;

The picture is one of indolence, luxury, and insensitivity.

yet they are not made ill by the collapse of Joseph!

The northern kingdom. Since Joseph was the ancestor of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, members of these tribes were frequently referred to as the “sons of Joseph”, or simply “Joseph”.

7 Therefore, now they shall be the first to go into exile, and their wanton revelry shall be done away with.

As the idle rich have been first in the receiving line of Israel’s bounty, it is fitting that they be the first to experience deportation.

2nd Reading - 1 Timothy 6:11-16

Today we wind up our study of 1st Timothy with Saint Paul’s instructions to Timothy on how he is to act. As a leader in the true church, Timothy will act very differently from the false teacher.

11 But you, man of God,

This is a title applied often in the Old Testament to prophets and it calls specific attention to the spiritual power possessed by the Church leader.

avoid all this. Instead, pursue righteousness, devotion, faith, love, patience, and gentleness.

Description of characteristics of Jesus which we are to emulate in our dutiful conduct. This emphasizes our adopted sonship.

12 Compete well for the faith.

Again, St. Paul uses a sports image – that of a pugilist in the arena. Paul’s own life

exemplified how this fight should be carried out (see 2 Timothy 4:7).

Lay hold of eternal life, to which you were called when you made the noble confession in the presence of many witnesses.

Probably a reference to the profession of faith made at baptism rather than, as some suggest, at ordination.

¹³ I charge (you) before God, who gives life to all things, and before Christ Jesus, who gave testimony under Pontius Pilate for the noble confession,

Jesus' own conduct in facing His passion and death when Pilate was governor exemplifies proper conduct.

¹⁴ to keep the commandment

The complete deposit of faith entrusted to Timothy; all the truths of Christianity.

without stain or reproach

This may refer to the commandment or to Timothy himself.

until the appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ

The parousia at the end of time

¹⁵ that the blessed and only ruler will make manifest at the proper time, the King of kings and Lord of lords, ¹⁶ who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, and whom no human being has seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal power. Amen.

This doxology in praise of God is Hellenistic Jewish in inspiration and stresses both God's transcendence and His superiority over all earthly creatures. The phraseology and structure suggest that these verses were taken from an ancient Christian hymn.

“He, the framer of all creation and maker of our race, became man for our sake, and coming from a holy Virgin's womb, on earth conversed with men. For us ungrateful servants the master endured death, even death on the cross, that the tyranny of sin might be destroyed, that the former condemnation might be abolished, that the gates of heaven might be open to us again. In this way he has exalted our nature, and set it on the throne of glory, and granted to them that love him an everlasting kingdom and joys beyond all that tongue can tell or ear can hear. He is mighty and the only potentate, King of kings, Lord of lords, whose might is invincible and whose lordship is beyond comparison. He alone is holy and dwells in holiness, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit is glorified. Into this faith I have been baptized.” [Saint John Damascene (died A.D. 749), *Barlaam and Ioasaph* 24,211]

Gospel - Luke 16:19-31

Having worked our way the past two weeks through several parables of Jesus, we now arrive at the story of the rich man and Lazarus. There is disagreement among the commentators whether or not this story is a parable. In all other parables, the players are anonymous; here one is named Lazarus. Whether or not it is a parable is unimportant for our study. The story addresses two errors: 1) That of those who denied the survival of the soul after death and therefore, retribution in the next life; and 2) That of those who interpreted material prosperity in this life as a reward for moral uprightness, and adversity as punishment. This story shows that, immediately after death, the soul is judged by God for all its acts – the particular judgment – and is rewarded or punished. This story also teaches the innate dignity of every human person – independently of social, financial, cultural or religious position. Respect for this dignity implies that we must help those who are experiencing any material or spiritual need.

[Jesus said to the Pharisees:] ¹⁹ “There was a rich man who dressed in purple garments

Woolen garments dyed with Tyrian purple (an expensive dye extracted from mussels). Due to its expense, purple clothing was worn only by royalty and other very wealthy individuals.

and fine linen

Fine Egyptian undergarments

and dined sumptuously each day. ²⁰ And lying at his door was a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹ who would gladly have eaten his fill of the scraps that fell from the rich man’s table. Dogs even used to come and lick his sores.

The owner’s pets would eat the bread with which the guests wiped the plates or their hands and then tossed under the table. How Lazarus longed to have some of even that food! The rich man’s sin consisted in his blind indifference to the agony of the poor.

²² When the poor man died, he was carried away by angels to the bosom of Abraham.

The choice position when one reclines with Abraham at the messianic banquet.

The rich man also died and was buried, ²³ and from the netherworld,

The abode of the dead, *sheol* (Hebrew)/*hades* (Greek)/*purgatorio* (Latin). Actually, both the Bosom of Abraham and the place where this rich man is are in sheol/hades/purgatory. As Josephus (a 1st century Pharisee and historian) explains in his *Discourse Concerning Hades*,

the just are guided by angels to the right hand, where there is a region of light where they wait for that rest and eternal new life in heaven; while the unjust are dragged by force to the left hand where they have a near view of hell itself, but they can also see the just. Between these two places, there is a chasm to prevent the just from having compassion on the unjust and to keep the unjust from crossing over.

where he was in torment, he raised his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. ²⁴ And he cried out, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me. Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am suffering torment in these flames.' ²⁵ Abraham replied, 'My child, remember that you received what was good during your lifetime while Lazarus likewise received what was bad; but now he is comforted here, whereas you are tormented. ²⁶ Moreover, between us and you a great chasm is established to prevent anyone from crossing who might wish to go from our side to yours or from your side to ours.' ²⁷ He said, 'Then I beg you, father, send him to my father's house, ²⁸ for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they too come to this place of torment.' ²⁹ But Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them.' ³⁰ He said, 'Oh no, father Abraham,

Notice that the rich man continues to call Abraham "father". He is not ignored because he is to "call no man father" (Matthew 23:9), but because mere words do not make one a child of Abraham and therefore a member of the reconstituted Israel. The rich man has not produced the deeds of loving kindness that would have signified repentance from his self-centered, callous way of life.

but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' ³¹ Then Abraham said, 'If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone should rise from the dead.'"

This parallels the story of Jesus' friend Lazarus of Bethany who was at the banquet and whose resurrection from the dead failed to convince the Jewish leaders of Jesus' messiahship. This concluding verse not only emphasizes that knowledge of the Law is insufficient, for the Law must be kept with humble repentance, but also teaches that wondrous events, even resurrection from the dead, do not automatically save men. By this story, the well-off in Luke's community are urged to help the Lazarus' in their midst. Although the poor are saved by grace alone (as shown in the story), they too need to respond to God's call.

It is also important to realize, as pointed out last week, that from Jesus' own lips we hear of the ability of those who have gone before us to intercede for those they have left behind.