

15TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, B  
CALLED TO TRUST

*“Jesus summoned the Twelve and began to send them out in pairs ... take nothing for the journey except a staff – no bread, no haversack, no copper for your purses” (Mk. 6: 7, 8).*

***Last week we reflected on some implications of being a prophet.*** In Ezekiel, called and sent to a rebellious nation of Israel; in Paul, who was given a “thorn in the flesh” to curtail his pride, and in Jesus rejected by His people, we realised that being a prophet of God offers no safety guards. God’s servant should be ready to go to the roughest places to preach The Word to the toughest people; where the self is a threat to the accomplishment of the divine, God can allow His messenger to be subdued to remain humble, relying on His grace for success; and the rejection of Jesus, serves a constant reminder that anyone responding to God’s call and doing His will should not allow himself to wallow in the illusion of constant human approval and love. Be these as they may, we acknowledge the assurance: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2Cor. 12: 9). Today’s theme continues to focus on the life of prophets and discipleship.

***In the First Reading (Amos 7: 12-15),*** the prophet Amos, a shepherd and migrant fieldworker from Judah called by God and sent to the people of Northern Kingdom of Israel under the reign of King Jeroboam II (783-743 BC), is opposed by Amaziah, the prophet of the National Sanctuary in Bethel and the King’s “Special Adviser on Religious Affairs.” Amos’ message was a threat to his privileged position and livelihood. He would not live to let that happen. Hence, not only did he ask Amos to leave and never return: “Go away, seer; go back to Judah; earn your bread there”, but he had also reported Amos to the king: “Amos is plotting a conspiracy against you in the very centre of Israel; the land is no longer able to bear his words.” Like Jesus in the Gospel of last week, Amos experiences rejection by one who should have been a co-worker. Here is a reflection of the Church’s internal conflicts, where Cardinals oppose the Pope, bishops and archbishops take sides with powerful politicians, they water down the teachings of the Church for the sake of “political correctness”, priests fight among themselves in a fierce battle of jealousy and bitter competition; one Christian sect demonises the other, pastors and men of God castigate and plot evils against each other, tearing the Body of Christ to pieces for selfish and unholy reasons. Where do we stand? Are we for Christ or Caesar? Are we prepared for these kinds of oppositions? Or are we perpetrators of these rejections and internal rancour?

***In the Second Reading (Eph. 1: 3-14)***, Paul echoes the blessings that we have received from God through Christ, which have made us adopted sons and daughters. He reveals that this was God's plan for us before we were born so that through our calling, we may fulfil His kind purposes. From Paul's perspective, everything we are and have are privileges. This recalls the calling of Amos, a shepherd, who was neither a prophet nor had any prophetic lineage was called by God. This resonates in the calling of the apostles, men of little learning and no experience of public speech, tasked with the mandate of establishing a new kingdom beginning from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth (Acts 1: 8). God does not call experts and professionals to accomplish His mission, but He calls ordinary people and gives them the grace to accomplish extraordinary feats. So that we may be humble and grateful in our successes.

***In the Gospel (Mk. 6: 7-13)***, Jesus summons His disciples sending them out in pairs. The instructions of Jesus are very profound with deep meanings. They recall the instructions God gave to the Twelve Tribes of Israel on the eve of their departure from Egypt (Ex. 12: 11; Deut. 8: 2-4). They, like the disciples, were to carry no bread, only one set of clothes, wearing a pair of sandals and carrying a staff for the entire journey. Like the Ancient Jews, the disciples were to look up to God as their Provider and Carer.

***"He sent them out in pairs – two by two"***: This recalls God's words in the Garden of Eden; "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will give him a suitable companion" (Gen. (2: 18). Being sent in pairs serves the purpose of companionship. Loneliness can easily cause discouragement and depression; being a lone on such a mission makes the disciples vulnerable to suspicion, temptation, danger and threat to life. Going in twos lends support, encouragement and sharing of experience and possible brotherly corrections.

***"Take nothing for the journey except a staff – no bread, no haversack, no coppers for their purse. They were to wear sandals. But do not take a spare tunic"***: This sounds very harsh and austere. A staff is a symbol of authority, leadership, and power. We recall the staff of Moses; the shepherds in Israel always had a staff, and God as the Shepherd of His Children comforts them with His rod and staff (Ps. 23). The disciples were leaders with power and authority. When God calls, He empowers us, giving us authority over the forces that oppose, counter, and contradict His power. The instruction of carry no bread, haversack nor money was to take away the possible temptation of self-sufficiency and delusion of self-reliance. For when a man is given power, money and food, there is a greater likelihood to be carried away by pride and arrogance. Therefore, they were to learn to rely not on their resources but God as their source of providence. It was to build their trust and faith in God for the future tasks that would be most challenging and demanding. Also, their lack of material

possession was to lend credence to their message for they would be seen as preaching the gospel out of conviction and not for any sordid gains. For us, we must realise that when God calls, He always provides what is needed.

***“And if any place does not welcome you and people refuse to listen to you ...”***: Jesus does not fantasise nor flatter. He does not want us to imagine any illusions of pleasures and easy success. Thus, he tells His disciples, and indeed all of us, that we will not always be welcomed. We will not always be listened to. We will not always be praised. People will reject us, persecute us, betray us, and even kill us for being His children. These are the facts. The choice of responding and accepting the calling is our own.

***“So, they set off to preach repentance; and they cast out many devils, and anointed many sick people with oil and cured them”***: The message is given. We are not called to preach ourselves nor our message. We are called to preach the Word of God. The truth of God’s love, forgiveness, and healing power. When God converts a hardened heart and heals through us, we are not to claim the glory. We have been called to be instruments and vessels of God’s goodness amid our wicked worlds.

***My dear friends***, each of us has been called personally. Let us make sincere personal efforts to respond with generosity and trust that He Who called us will never abandon us. If we trust in Him, He will never fail. For He is always faithful.