

Help Save Others



I. A LOOK AT THE THREE READINGS

FIRST READING (Am 8:4-7)

Man's injustices

⁴Hear this, you who **trample upon the needy/ and destroy the poor of the land:/**
⁵“When will the new moon be over,” you ask,
“that we may sell our grain,/ And the sabbath,
that we may open the grain-bins?/ We **will diminish the ephah,/ *Nadd to the shekel,/ and fix our scales for cheating!/⁶We will buy the destitute for silver,/ and the poor for a bribe;/ even the worthless grain we will sell!”/**

God's justice

⁷The LORD has sworn by the pride of Jacob:/
Never will I forget a thing they have done !

THE FOCUS: **Injustices**

COMMENTARY

- Amos is a prophet of social justice. He is the first among the writing prophets. He prophesied long before the Exile.
- In the text (oracle), Amos is warning those who oppress the poor and the needy in parallel form: you who trample the needy // you who destroy the poor of the land (V.4).
- V.5 indicates the oppressors' impatience of not being able to do their thing because of the “new

moon” and “sabbath.” (holy days are even seen as time constraints.

- V.5b indicates that oppressors are business people. They cheat by diminishing the ephah (*standard of measure, more than a bushel*), adding to the shekel (*money, measurement also*), fixing the scales.
- V.6 indicates that the oppressors are engaged in buying slaves cheaply.
- They make money out of anything.
- V.7 serves as severe warning to the oppressors.
- It is just a matter of time that God will get them and finish them off.

REFLECTIONS

Amos prophesies during the time of Jeroboam II, king of Israel (economic boom).

Amos comes from Tekoa, Judah.

God sends Amos to speak against those who abuse and take advantage of the poor.

Amos, the prophet, is the mouthpiece of God. He is the voice of God. He speaks in behalf of God.

As a prophet, he communicates the message of God (dissain, warning) to those who hold power and control economy, who oppress and manipulate the poor.

The poor are the ones cheated, bought and sold by the rich merchants.

Here God takes side with the defenseless poor.

They are not objects and commodities.

We must not become rich at their expense.

We must not take away the little that they have: their dignity, their rights and freedom.

Or else, God will come and get us.

True enough, the Northern Kingdom (Israel) was punished because it did not stop, cease and desist doing it. It was destroyed by the Assyrians in 721 B.C.

This may happen to us, if we do not stop oppressing the poor.

We must exercise justice and respect the rights and freedom of others, especially the poor.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM (Ps 113:1-2, 4-6, 7-8)

PRAISE THE LORD WHO LIFTS UP THE POOR.

SECOND READING (1 Tim 2:1-8)

Prayers for everyone, those in authority

^{1*} First of all, then, I ask that supplications, prayers, petitions, and thanksgivings be offered for everyone, ²for kings and for all in authority,

Purpose of prayers

that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all devotion and dignity. ^{3b}This is good and pleasing to God our savior, ^{4c}who wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth.

Reason

^{5a}For there is **one God**./ There is also **one mediator** between God and the human race./ Christ Jesus, himself human./ ^{6e}who gave himself as ransom for all. This was the testimony* at the proper time.

Mission of Paul (writer)

^{7f}For this I was appointed preacher and apostle (I am speaking the truth, I am not lying), teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

^{8*}It is my wish, then, that in every place the men should pray, lifting up holy hands, without anger or argument.

THE FOCUS: Oneness of God/Mediator

COMMENTARY

• In v.1, Paul solicits prayers from Timothy (bishop of Ephesus) for everyone including kings and those in authority (administrators). Why?

• V.2 gives the reason why: to lead a peaceful life. Those in authority have the potential to wreck havoc upon our communities (by their greed and insecurities).

• V.3 gives a comment if we have quiet life.

• It is a sign of salvation. We come to know the truth (v.4).

• Main reason for praying: There exists only one God, only one mediator: Jesus Christ [not anyone, not the king or the powers-that-be] (v.5).

• V.7 indicates the purpose of Paul: as a preacher, apostle and teacher.

• V.8 contains the wish of Paul: to pray without anger or argument (resentment).

REFLECTIONS

Paul addresses himself to Timothy, a pastor, a church leader.

Paul reiterates the importance of praying for everyone and for those in power. Paul is aware that if those in authority commit errors and injustices, there is no peace and quiet in the land.

Paul's appeals to prayer implies that all must subject themselves to the one God; also to the one mediator between God and human race, Christ Jesus.

Christ is seen also as ransom (reference to his crucifixion).

GOSPEL READING (Lk 16:1-13)

Steward fired by his employer

^{1*}Then he also said to his disciples, "A rich man had a **steward** who was reported to him for squandering his property. ²He summoned him and said, 'What is this I hear about you? Prepare a full account of your **stewardship**, because you can no longer be my **steward**.'

(The steward here should be understood in terms of the Palestinian context of custom agents acting on behalf of their masters / bosses and

their (agents') usurious practices.

The dishonesty of the steward consists in squandering his master's property. Someone has reported his wrongdoing. Before he leaves, he is asked to give an accounting of his stewardship.)

Steward contemplating how to survive

³The **steward** said to himself, 'What shall I do, now that my master is taking the position of **steward** away from me? I am not strong enough to dig and I am ashamed to beg. ⁴I know what I shall do so that, when I am removed from the **stewardship**, they may welcome me into their homes.'

(The steward exercises some wisdom on how to survive. He knows his feelings and limitations. As administrator, he still knows how to manage himself. He has a solution. He will find a refuge in "their homes." Whose homes?)

The homes of his master's debtors / clients.)

⁵He called in his master's debtors one by one. To the first he said, 'How much do you owe my master?'

(The steward now acts on his plan. Very systematic. He is calculative.)

First debtor

⁶He replied, 'One hundred measures of olive oil.' He said to him, 'Here is your promissory note. Sit down and quickly write one for fifty.' (50 less, madaya [cheating])

Second debtor

⁷Then to another he said, 'And you, how much do you owe?' He replied, 'One hundred kors* of wheat.' He said to him, 'Here is your promissory note; write one for eighty' (20 less, madaya pa rin [cheating]).

Comment of the master

^{8*} ^aAnd the master commended that dishonest **steward** for acting prudently.* "For the children of this world are more prudent in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light.

(God seems to condone cheating and dishonesty. Why does he commend that dishonest steward?)

Precisely, the master is firing him because he does not administer properly his property.

This question calls for a little attention.

Some scholars propose that the master

is commending the dishonest steward not for cheating again (100 to 50 measures, 100 to 80 qors), but for restoring what he first of all has taken away from them (debtors).

The debtors might have been indebted just 50 measures and 80 qors respectively, but the steward asked for more for himself. Here he is just returning what he had unjustly taken from them. In this way, he would make friends with them. As a result, they would allow him to stay in their homes.)

Teachings of Jesus:

On wealth

^{9b}I tell you, make friends for yourselves with dishonest wealth,* so that when it fails, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

(Make use of material things to win friends. Do not be selfish. You will not have them for ever.)

On being trustworthy

^{10*} 'The person who is trustworthy in very small matters is also trustworthy in great ones; and the person who is dishonest in very small matters is also dishonest in great ones. ¹¹If, therefore, you are not trustworthy with dishonest wealth, who will trust you with true wealth? ¹²If you are not trustworthy with what belongs to another, who will give you what is yours?

(Do not take for granted small things. Show that you can be trusted with small things. Bigger things will be entrusted to you, no matter how small. Do your best to administer it according to the owner's purpose. You are just stewards. You cannot do whatever you want. Respect the owner who entrusts things to you.)

On single-heartedness

^{13d}No servant can serve two masters.* He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

(If you choose God, reject mammon. You cannot combine God and mammon. When we serve God, we must be single-hearted. We are focused on God, not on anything else. Anything else is a distraction.

Mammon makes our service to God

half-hearted. Mammon robs us of true and wholehearted service to God.)

THE FOCUS: Stewardship

II. TYING THE THREE READINGS TOGETHER TO DEVELOP YOUR HOMILY/SHARING

The First Reading protests against those in authority for being unjust. They abuse their authority by taking advantage of the poor.

The Second Reading solicits prayers for those in authority so that they may not cause troubles in the land.

The Gospel Reading talks about being a true and faithful steward (authority). Authority must be exercised with prudence.

How to develop your sharing / homily

Have you been laid off by your employer? What are the reasons?

Some reasons for firing employees: inefficient, no discipline, hard headed, cannot follow instructions, etc.

We must understand that even if we are just employees, we are given a certain power and authority.

In the First Reading, Amos registers his protest against those in power who take advantage of the poor. They abuse their authority to enrich themselves. They cheat. They alter the measuring units. They buy cheaply the slaves as if they are commodities. They were considered commodities before.

Amos as a prophet of social justice has a special heart for the poor and the oppressed. He wants them to be liberated from oppressive structures.

In the Second Reading, St. Paul urges Timothy (and the readers) to pray for the authority, in order to have peace. St. Paul is aware that bad governance of authority can wreck havoc to the church and community.

The Gospel talks about firing of a man/ steward who squanders his authority. He does not

administer the property of his master very well. He is irresponsible.

The Gospel advocates good governance and administration and faithful stewardship. No steward should in any way alter the purpose of his master regarding his property. He should know his role and limitations or else... (he is fired!)

The Gospel also teaches prudence as a necessary virtue to survive.

Prudence is translated here as knowing how to make friends, how to make use of your wealth, belongings, property to establish good relationships. People will not allow you to eat and drink with them, stay with them if you are not a good guest, if you do not know how to give and take (if you are not a converted person).

How do we servant leaders / ministers of the church exercise our authority?

Are we oppressive to the little ones? (First Reading)

Are we praying for those in authority higher than we? (Second Reading)

Are we squandering our power [meaning not exercising our authority, always absent, not doing our homework well, not giving reports, receipts, etc.?](Gospel)

Christians should know how to exercise their own authority, prudently, like the children of this world.

Jesus is a good model of responsible, loving and prudent authority.

Jesus gives priority to the needs of the poor. Jesus challenges those in authority to behave and act according to the will of God who gives them authority.

Jesus has exercised his power and authority for the benefit of mankind until the last drop of his blood at Mt. Calvary.

He maximized his three years of earthly ministry. He left an imprint in the hearts and minds of people seeking to deepen their relationship with God.

Jesus was single-hearted in serving God, to proclaim the reign of God, by preaching, teaching, healing and forgiving people who came to him.

Jesus did not seek to make a name for himself,

to enrich himself. He was focused on his priorities, his mission.

With full power and strength, Jesus shouted, “Father, forgive them...”

Truly, Jesus lived according to what was expected of him by the Father.

In the eucharist, we can see that Jesus is still giving himself to us.

He is still exercising his authority by dispensing his graces to us in the forms of consecrated bread and wine.

He makes friends with us by allowing himself to be eaten by us in this meal.

The eucharist continues the faithful stewardship and servanthood of Jesus in the vineyard of the Lord.

In the eucharist, Jesus still teaches how to share, how to give way, how to be humble, and how to be prudent and single-hearted servants.

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III. OUR CONTEXT

1. Solemnity of Our Lady of Penafrancia . Patroness of Bicol Region. Why is the Virgin Mary (Our *Ina*, as *Bicolanos* call her) also an outstanding example of a prudent disciple? Can you cite a bible story? (HM).