

Year B Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
July 15, 2012
Am 7:12-15; Ps 85; Eph 1:3-14; Mk 6:7-13

We can discern a possible topic in this Sunday's readings: the hidden mystery of God's plan (or "plans," although God is utter simplicity), which does not conform to human expectation (that's why we say it's "hidden"!). Amos was a man from the south of Israel who had two "day jobs," and earned his living from them. But the Lord called him from his work and told him to go to the north to prophesy in the northern royal sanctuary city of Bethel, in the northern kingdom of Israel (this is akin to picketing a combination White House and Vatican, to give an idea). In those days, "prophets" for the most part were a hired combination "cheerleader-curser," that is, kings would keep them on their payroll to lift the morale of the army and curse the enemy (see, e.g., 1 Kgs 22:5-23; Jer 23:9-40; 38:1-6; Mi 3:9-12, and the "oracles against the nations found in most of the books of the prophets, e.g., Is 15-23). Amos denies being such a prophet or "son of a prophet," meaning member of a guild of prophets (see, e.g., 2 Kgs 2:3). He is not prophesying in the north, as the sanctuary priest Amaziah supposes, in order to "earn his bread," but by divine vocation. And rather than being cowed by Amaziah's threats (and Amaziah was close to the king), Amos in fact just reinforces his prophecy of doom for the northern kingdom, where in the midst of religious pomp (Yahweh hates their religious feasts and pilgrimages, Am 5:21-24) and economic prosperity for the few (Am 3:13-4:3; 6:1-14), the poor are being sold and foreclosed upon for small debts and through legal bribes and injustice, Am 5:7-13; cf. the contemporaneous prophets Isaiah 5:8-9; 10:1-2; Micah 2:1-11.

So we can say that the northern kingdom and its leaders were "clueless" about God's way. They think God can be bribed with religious festivals so that he does not notice injustices. They think Amos is like them, trying to make a buck "prophesying." But God's plans –in this case, plans to punish and destroy– are revealed to the true prophet Amos, who communicates them to the people. Jesus too sent his disciples without material provisions to announce the Kingdom of God and to preach repentance. But whoever did not receive them was to receive a testimony in the form of shaking the very dust off the feet to signify that their rejection meant there was no communion between the gospel and those who reject the gospel.

Not everyone has the right spirit to understand and believe this gospel, God's plan hidden from the foundation of the world and finally revealed in Christ. "Who believed this report?," said

Isaiah in 53:1 (cf. Jn 12:37-40), the report of the “suffering servant” who washed his disciples’ feet, not understood by many, thought to be accursed instead of the bringer of salvation (Is 53:1-5). Let us listen and watch carefully in order to discern what God is trying to accomplish through us, to try to understand what his plan, unexpected as it may seem, is.