

15th Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 15, 2018

If God sent a prophet into our living room, we would probably listen carefully to what he had to say, at least, that's what we would like to think. But listening to God's word isn't always as easy as it appears. In today's First Reading, for example, we see a true prophet, chosen and sent by God, totally rejected. Amos had been telling the people of Israel that they needed to return to the basics of their religion, following the commandments, and giving up their self-indulgent idolatries. You would think that with God's authority and power behind him, everyone would simply hear and obey, but the message wasn't comfortable for them, and so they rejected it, and they sent the prophet Amos packing. The same phenomenon appears in today's Gospel. Jesus is giving some instructions to His first apostles and part of those instructions involves the proper way to react when people reject what they have to say. Jesus is preparing them for rejection – he knows that fallen human nature doesn't like to be pushed outside of its comfort zone. But His message of salvation does just that; it pushes us out of our comfort zone. Today the Church is asking us to reflect on how well we listen to God's prophets, to His words. Are we selective listeners, picking and choosing according to what fits our comfort zone, or are we true followers of Christ, willing to love and obey Him even when it means carrying our piece of the cross, willing to say with today's Psalm: "I will hear what God proclaims"? It's an important question. Our hearts are like the house Jesus mentions in the Gospel. If we welcome God's word, His grace will come and stay there, bringing peace, wisdom, and salvation. But if we don't, God's word will shake the dust from its feet and move on. St. Augustine used to say: "Beware of the grace of God that passes by, never to return again."

There is something comforting about these rejections that Amos and the apostles experienced. It shows us that some of the difficulties facing the Church today are not completely new. In today's First Reading, the spokesman who rejects Amos and sends him away is a priest, a public figure in Israel. He was supposed to be an expert in the things of God, but he didn't recognize God's voice, or if he did recognize it, he didn't follow it. In our Church today we find the same thing. We find Catholics, social and political celebrities, even priests, who preach a different Gospel. They reject certain aspects of Christ's teaching that comes to us through His chosen messengers, the popes

and the bishops in communion with them, and instead they put forth their own opinions as gospel truth. Well, they put forth what they think is their own opinion, but in fact, those opinions usually just happen to be the exact same opinion as popular culture. Popular culture tells us that abortion is a human right, that promiscuity and self-indulgence are healthy behaviors, that same-sex marriage is morally equivalent to true marriage, that killing human embryos to harvest their stem cells is praiseworthy. When Catholics who promote these positions say they are listening to their conscience, in fact they are listening to popular culture; they are accepting the comfortable lies instead of the uncomfortable truth. But God doesn't give up on them, just as he never gives up on us. He continues to call all of us to follow the steep path of salvation, to offer His unconditional forgiveness, to make His voice resound through the pope, the catechism, and the example of the saints. Our conscience is the radio God built into our hearts; but it's up to us to keep it tuned in to the right channel.

Listening to God can be uncomfortable – there's no escape from that. God loves us too much to let us vegetate in our comfort zones. He always leads us further along the path of spiritual maturity, further up the mountain of Christian wisdom, courage, and holiness. Today He is inviting us to renew our commitment to be good listeners and in this Mass He will remind us that He is worthy of such a commitment; He will not let us down: He is the Good Shepherd who gives up His own life for us in the Eucharist. But what about all the people whom Jesus is trying to speak to who are not here today to be reminded of that? What about our friends, family members, and colleagues who are afraid to swim against the current of popular culture and popular opinion? God wants to speak to them too, to convince them that His commandments and counsels are the real path to lasting happiness now and forever. God wants to speak to them, and how does He make His voice heard? Through us. We are His messengers, His ambassadors – just like Amos, just like the first apostles. We can follow their example by sharing with those around us the good news that God has shared with us. We don't have to make a big deal out of it; we just have to sincerely care about the people around us. Sin and selfishness can be comfortable, like poison hidden in honey. If we truly care about others, we will warn them about the poison, and point out where they can find true life-giving nourishment: in the Word of God, who loved the world so much that He gave His only Son, so that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.