

July 15, 2018 - 15<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

in our readings today from the Bible the theme seems to come out, to be called. All three of them have that theme. The first reading, from the prophet Amos. Amos lived in the southern kingdom of Israel. Once again a prophet was taken from the southern kingdom and sent to the northern kingdom to tell them they were messing up in the eyes of God. To tell them to straighten up, to put their faith in God and not worldly powers. Today we see a nice talking to the high priest Amaziah. Every king whether pagan or Jewish had a guild of prophets. They were paid like government employees and when the king had a problem and needed an answer, he would call them and say, "This is what I've got two choices, which one should I do? They would tell the king whichever one he wanted to do, whichever one was his favorite. Not Normally or not necessarily the word of God. So Amaziah is upset with Amos. He told him, "We don't want to listen to you you're telling us things that give us a guilty conscience you make everybody upset, you are a negative person." So he says, "Go from here back to your own country." And he said, "There you can begin to earn your bread by prophesizing." But Amos had to tell him, "I'm not a prophet I never was a prophet I don't want to be a prophet, God chose me to be a prophet." He said, "I was a shepherd and a dresser of sycamores." From this we know that Amos is one of the lowest levels of the social strata; shepherds and dressers of sycamores were the very lowest of the low. Now we know what a shepherd is, but a dresser of sycamores is interesting in that sycamore trees were considered the poor man's fig tree. But, to get the fruit off the sycamore tree, which by the way it was much smaller and harder to get, somebody had to go with a long stick and poke the fruit so that it would ripen properly for human consumption. Back when I lived in the East Coast, there's all these sycamores, I never dreamed you could eat them. They were not in the Boy Scout manual, other things were. So when I learned that yesterday, I thought wow. Now I have to figure out what's a sycamore because they don't grow here. Anyway, he's letting us know, "I had a good job I did good work I had another life but God said I needed to change." He's letting us know he was called by God.

In our second reading from St. Paul, St. Paul tells us we have been chosen by God. This is unique in the realm of divinity, "chosen by God." Most of the time people have god's, many of them to choose from. We chose a god but to have God choose us, is a unique and different thing in the eyes of divinity throughout the history of the human race. God has chosen us. That means He's letting us know how special we are. We have been chosen, we have been called. He uses the word chosen twice in the second reading, but He uses other kinds of verbs to let us know just how special we are. He granted us Jesus. We have redemption by Jesus's blood. We have the forgiveness of our sins by Jesus, on and on and on. He's letting us know we're special but he's also letting us know that we have been chosen, just like Amos. We've been called by God for a special function, just like Amos. He lets us know, He lets the Ephesians know, you can't act like the rest of society. You can't think like the rest of society, you have to be above them because you have been set aside, chosen, called by God. In our gospel it comes down to what are we going to do with the call, at least one of them. It says he sent out the twelve two by two, in other Gospels it's 72. The two x two is critical because in Jewish law you had to have two people as witnesses to verify the truth, to verify the facts. When you go out two x two there are witnesses to verify healings and other miracles. And two x two means if one of them starts to think about making a bad, immoral decision, the other one can rein him in and pull him back. All priests are supposed to be two x two but we're not, so we have to rein ourselves in. Sometimes that doesn't work so well, that's why we ask for your prayers, so that we listen to our guardian angel. And he gave them authority over unclean spirits. You and I have authority over unclean spirits. You and I are able to pray over people and

release them from certain spirits. Yes, there are other spirits much stronger, that we have to get a bishop's permission to have an exorcism, but that's very rare. Normally, the spirits we get hit with we can pray over each other. But we're so afraid and timid in that aspect, and yet that's part of our calling, to release others from spirits. It's interesting because he told them, "Only take a walking stick and wear sandals but not a second tunic." But what does that mean? Well, in Jesus's time the Jews in Palestine wore five articles of clothing. Their innermost garment, the one closest to your skin was the tunic. Then on the outside was a cloak by day and a blanket by night. Then they put on a girdle. This is not a girdle like we have today. Men and women both put on girdles at the time. What this was, was to tuck in your cloak, you tuck that in if you were doing work so it didn't get in the way, so didn't get dirty, didn't have to sleep with a dirty blanket, you'd have something relatively clean. Then, everybody wore a headdress, a scarf or a piece of cloth over their head, person, to keep from getting sunburned. And then, they had to wear footwear. It's interesting, because in the time of Jesus there were only three styles of footwear for men and three styles for women. You go into a shoe store today and you're like, "Wow! What am I going to wear?" But, back then you had three choices and these choices were made by how much money you made. Sandals were made of leather if you were rich, sandals were made of wood if you are middle-class, (can you imagine splinters in the bottom of your feet?) and if you were poor you braided grass and made sandals. So there were only three kinds. Amelda Marcos would have been horribly upset, not enough shoes. And they carried a basket with their traveling bag made of leather, in which they kept their belongings that they had when they traveled. But it's interesting that we get stories that say the Jewish priests would take this bag and they would go from village to village collecting money. People would hate to see them come, "Oh no here comes the priest again, he wants money." Some people say that about me because we were building a parish but at least I'm not walking around showing it off. Jesus said, "Take a walking stick, your regular clothes and your sandals." But there's a second tunic mentioned here, what is that all about? Well people were thinking, you know what since the tunic is what we call underwear, I want a change of underwear. Jesus is saying you don't need it. My dad says one pair of underwear is good for four days, you just change it around a little bit. I don't know if the military taught him that or not. Anyway, Jesus is saying just take what you have which you need, not what you want, what you need, and then you have to rely on God. Father Richard Roll is a Jesuit priest and about 20 years ago he decided to do, what the founder of the Jesuits said, put yourself in Scripture. St. Ignatius of Loyola said, "Put yourself in Scripture." He said, "If you want to understand Scripture put yourself in the story, imagine all the different angles." So father Richard decided, I'm going to see what this particular story is all about. So, he took only one set of shoes, a walking stick, and he didn't take any money, or anything like that. (He had his driver's license because you need that in today's society.) He decided he was going to walk from San Diego to San Francisco relying on the generosity of strangers. So he started out. He would tell the people what he was doing and ask for a meal and they would give it to him. He said, "Come evening I was a little apprehensive but I would knock on somebody's door and tell them what I was doing and they would give me a place to sleep at night." Nowhere was he turned away. People were intrigued by pilgrimage, they loved it. He was amazed. He said, "People are basically good, and generous, and kind." And that's what Jesus is saying here, put your trust in God and your fellow human beings. He said that and so they went off. And what happened? Putting their faith and trust in God by answering the call from Jesus they were able to drive out demons and able to witness to the good news of the gospel. Why? Because there wasn't anything to distract them or the people they were going to, in order to dilute the message. The call is there for us as well. We are to put our faith and trust in God, not in material possessions. We are to minister to other people, we are to talk about the gospel,

but not necessarily in words. There was the international grouping of young teenagers from different countries in Europe, and some from Africa came. They were talking and one of the topics that came up was, how do you think we should best evangelize people? The topic of pamphlets and books and videos came up. One girl from Africa said, "You know how we evangelize a village in Africa, in my country?" She said, "We pick a Christian family to go live in that village and by their example, their daily lives, the way they treat each other, the way they treat the other people, soon the village is Christian. So, we can use our actions. But we are called by God to witness, we are called by God to be Christians, followers of Christ. We are not called to be Democrats or Republicans or anything else. We are called to be Christians, followers of Christ. And we are called to bring other people to the faith, to believe in Jesus Christ. That's our calling. That's Amos's calling, hey, listen to the word of God. That's St. Paul's calling, hey, let me tell you about Jesus Christ. That's the calling of the apostles. Apostle is a word that means sent, one who is sent. You and I are apostles, the big "A" is for the twelve, the small "a" is for everybody else. This week the church reminds us, hey, you are called, you are called by Christ to be followers. Do something about it. Don't get fixated on the culture and what the culture says and what the culture believes. Get fixated on Christ and by your very lives, share the calling.

God bless you.