

Sometimes They Just Don't Listen

15th Sunday of Ordinary Time – Year B

Amos 7:12-15
Psalm 85:9-10, 11-12, 13-14

Ephesians 1:3-14
Mark 6:7-13

After the great schism of the Israelite Kingdom between the kingdom of the North (Israel) and the kingdom of the South (Judah), Amos, a southerner, was called by God to be a prophet to the Northern Kingdom. The response to his preaching, as expected, was hostile, as the religious, political and prophetic leaders rejected him and commanded him to return to his home country, the Southern Kingdom of Judah. In a bold response to this admonition, Amos asserted himself, declaring that it was God who called him to prophesy. Therefore he would not relent (Amos 7:12-15). Amos was one among many prophets of the Old Testament commissioned to preach, call, and admonish God's people. All met with varied responses. Some, like Isaiah, would enjoy great notoriety while others, like Jeremiah, would be tragic figures of the Old Testament because the people just didn't listen.

In giving His instructions to the Twelve, as He sent them out two by two, Jesus insinuated that there would be times when the people simply wouldn't respond to the proclamation of the Kingdom of God. The response of the Apostles was to be subtle yet dramatic; they were not to spend too much time if a "place does not



welcome...or listen..." Rather, they were to "shake the dust off [their] feet" and move on.

St. Paul had such an experience with his own people. After zealously opposing the new Christian movement, even to the point of concurrence in the stoning of one of their deacons, he had very little credibility with his fellow Jewish people when later he became one of Christianity's steadfast advocates.

Paul's complete change of heart was met with utter skepticism to out-and-out violence and threats to his own life. In short, they just didn't listen.

Having minimal success with the Jews, Paul metaphorically shook the proverbial dust from his feet, declaring, "from now on I will go to the Gentiles" (Acts 18:6). In doing so, Paul did not abandon the Jews to a doomed spiritual fate. Rather, in recognizing his limitations with them, he let go, and moved on to where his preaching would bear fruit, leaving the Jewish people to those Apostles who would have better success.

This is the same for all preachers of the Gospel. [*In this "Year for Priests" called by Pope Benedict XVI, we will remember in a special way the many priests*]

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who serve the diverse communities of our Church throughout the world. Like the Apostles who went before them, they experience a wide range of success and failure, just as Jesus promised, just as the prophets experienced, and just as Paul and all of the Apostles endured among the varied communities of faith they founded and nurtured. There may be scarcely a priest who has not experienced this range of receptions from the communities they serve, both positive and negative, both successful and less productive; ranging from those who think of them as God's gift to the priesthood, to its bane, and every sentiment in between; from people who hang on their every word to others who simply don't listen.

This also is true of the reception of the Church throughout the world and throughout history. The diversity of those called to bear witness to the Good News of Jesus Christ is complementary to the diversity of those who hear it. As Jesus hinted in the instructions to the Apostles, the Gospel message preached by the Church will be received by some, and not received by others.

The Church has enjoyed great success in some places and great challenge in others, but never outright failure. As priests and preachers of God's Word, we are not to lose heart when the people just don't listen; when the message we preach with our

words or our actions falls on deaf, sometimes even hostile ears. Jesus said that such things are bound to happen and instructed us, not to lose hope when it does, but to let go and move on, recognizing that others, equally called to bear witness, may have better success.

As with Paul and the Jews, we see that perhaps we may be called to preach elsewhere, with greater success, bearing richer fruit. Like the example of the Apostles we recognize that there will always be someone else, also called by God, who may yield better results with those for whom we may have had minimal achievement, or outright failure.

In letting go and putting all things in the hands of God, we serve as better stewards of the mission given us to accomplish. Whether priest to their flock or the general faithful in our

day-to-day living of the Gospel, we recognize that we are merely the instruments; that it is God "who accomplishes all things according to the intention of his will, so that we might exist (and work) for the praise of his glory..." (Eph 1:11).

Fr. William Nicholas
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