

# Holy Year of Mercy

## Amos & Divine Forgiveness: *A God Who Does Not Change*

Catholic San Francisco -- September 15, 2016  
25<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time – Year C

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*Amos 8:4-7*                      *1 Timothy 2:1-8*  
*Psalm 113:1-2, 4-6, 7-8*      *Luke 16:1-13*

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As familiar as they are, the writings of the Old Testament Prophets are perhaps the most difficult to read. Always calling the people back to a faithful, authentic observance of the Covenant, calling for proper worship and social behavior, the prophets regularly chastise the people for their infidelities, exposing their often flagrant violations, warning them of God's imminent judgment, with an occasional promise of comfort and restoration (after a period of punishment and purification, of course!).

Amos is no exception. As we celebrate the love and forgiveness that God bestows upon us, we hear, looming over us like a tapestry of divine wrath and retribution, an expose of Israel's sins, their violations of the Sabbath, the destruction of the poor, the manipulation of the currency to the detriment of the downtrodden -- all with a final ominous assurance from the very mouth of God: *"Never will I forget a thing they have done!"* (Amos 8:4-7)

So much for a Year of Mercy!

It is easy to retreat behind the mercy and forgiveness of a God who sent us His Son. We, perhaps, are tempted to make distinctions between the "god" of the Old Testament and the "god" of the New -- until we remember: It is the same God! The God preached by the Apostles is the same God



preached by the Prophets. As Paul reminds us of the Church: "You form a building which rises on the foundation of the apostles and prophets..." (Ephesians 2:20). The preaching of the Apostles in no way changes or excludes the preaching of the Prophets.

After all, God does not change. So what are we to make of this? What exactly was Amos preaching? How is this God of wrath and infinite memory for our sins to be reconciled with the God of mercy and

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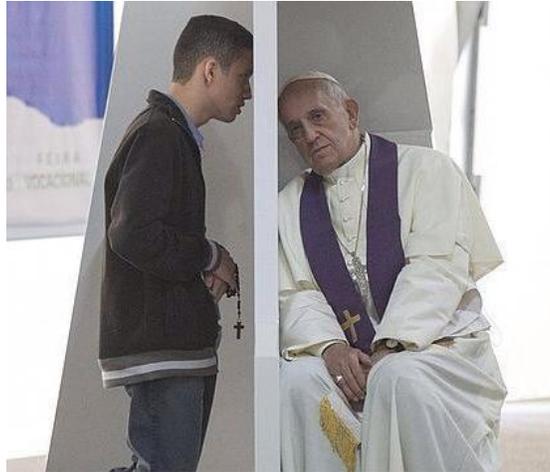
## The Prophet Amos

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forgiveness preached by the Apostles and revealed by Christ, Himself?

To begin with, we remember that in the tradition of the Holy Scriptures, the prophets serve as a mouthpiece for God. Their words are God's words spoken to the people, and therefore, read in our Sacred Mass, spoken to us. As Amos warns the people, God is warning the people. As Amos declares their sins, God is declaring their sins; sins that God will never forget.

With the advent of the Messiah, however, something else was revealed. John the Baptist, the last of the Messianic Prophets, preached a Baptism of Repentance, in which the people came to be Baptized in the Jordan, "as they confessed their sins" (Mark 1:5). The Apostles received the confession of those who had become believers (Acts 19:18). James teaches us to confess our sins (James 5:16) while John assures us: "If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive



us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

God does not change. The God of judgment preached by the Prophets is the same God of forgiveness preached by the Apostles. Prophets like Amos teach us that God will never forget our sins, if *God* has to list them for us. However, as Christ revealed, the Apostles taught, and the Church reminds us, God *does* forget when we do our own listing and confessing of our own sins.

So in this Year of Mercy, let us not put forth the usual provisos, pretexts or excuses. Let us accept God as God and beat Him to the punch with the means of grace His Son has given us. Let us declare our own sins in the Sacrament of Confession and ensure a divine forgetfulness, and, more importantly, the Mercy of Divine Forgiveness.

Fr. William Nicholas

**CONFESS  
YOURSELF**