

Father O'Connor's Homily for 14 July 2024
Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time-B

Amos 7: 12-15
Ephesians 1: 3-14
Mark 6: 7-13

I wonder if you are ever tempted to advise God as to how He could do a better job with this world. Like, for instance, with food – wouldn't it be great if God would put all the nutrients that we need in pizza, fried chicken and ice cream, and put all those unnecessary calories, sodium and fat in turnips, rutabagas and parsnips?

Sometimes when we look at the people that God has chosen, we might think that God could have done a better job. Like Moses – Moses led the Chosen People from the slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land. But Moses had murdered a man earlier in his life.

And then there is King David – from whose family-line the Messiah, Jesus, would be born. King David gave us the Book of Psalms, through God's inspiration. King David had also committed adultery and murder.

The Lord chose Amos to be His prophet. We heard about Amos in the first reading today. Amos is brought before Amaziah, the chief priest of the royal temple, who asks him, "Amos, what are your credentials? Where did you go to prophet school?"

Amos answers, "I didn't go to any prophet school. I have shepherded sheep, and I learned how to do that from my father and my grandfather. As a side job, I have been pruning sycamore trees – I picked that up on my own by watching others.

"But I have seen people cheating other people in the market place. I have seen widows being evicted from their homes, and I have seen children being sold for the price of a new pair of sandals. God called me to go and prophesy. Those are my credentials."

And still we wonder: couldn't God have chosen some more promising candidates?

In the New Testament, God doesn't seem to do much better. We look at Jesus' "cabinet" – Peter, James and John. Peter had denied even knowing Jesus three times. James and John were very ambitious, and their pushy mother thought that they ought to sit at the Jesus' right and left hand in the

heavenly kingdom. It sure looks like God could have made some better choices.

And, in today's Gospel, Jesus sends out the twelve Apostles – including Judas – to preach repentance and to cure the sick in His name. God chose them.

We hear in the second reading today from Paul's letter to the Ephesians that "God chose us in Him, Jesus Christ, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish before Him" [Ephesians 1: 4].

God has chosen us: to be His beloved sons and daughters – and to be disciples of His Son, Jesus – and to live as grateful and generous stewards of God's bountiful blessings.

We have been chosen by God. And still we can wonder: "Lord, are you really sure that you want me?" The answer from God is: "Yes, I do. I have chosen you!"

There was a college graduation ceremony in a small Midwestern town. As the procession of graduates moved out at the end, a student broke from the line and went to his parents. Everyone could see by the way that they were dressed that they were not people of privilege. He put his diploma in his mother's hands, and then she reached over and took her husband's hand and put it on top of hers on that diploma. She said to her husband, "It was worth all the sacrifice, wasn't it, dear?"

And it was. That graduate was grateful for all that his mother and father had gone without so that he could go to college. He knew where his gratitude belonged.

Everything that we have and are is a gift from God. God wants us to receive His gifts and develop them with increase. As His stewards, we show our gratitude to God – who has chosen us to play a part in His plan for the world – by generously sharing a portion of the blessings that we have received from Him with others.

Sister Irene Sandfry was the volunteer sacristan at Saint Joseph Parish in Avon Lake where I served as the pastor for eighteen years. She died 9½ years ago at the age of 92. And she was a very holy woman.

Every morning, when her alarm clock rang at 3:15 AM, the first thing that she would do – even before turning on the light – was to take hold of a small statue of Jesus on her night stand and say: "Jesus, what can I do for you today?" What a great way to begin each day, yes?

I recommend this practice to you – at any hour of the day or night. Don't be afraid to ask Him: "Jesus, what can I do for you today?" And don't be afraid to listen for His response. He will let you know.

And if you think that you are a particular challenge to God, just look at the people He has chosen in the past, and see what God was able to do through them with the power of His grace!

Let us pray: Jesus, what can I do for you today? Help me to know. And help me to remember that, in spite of everything else, you have chosen me to be your disciple. Jesus, I count on you to give me all that I need to accomplish your dreams for me.

And, as we sang in response to Psalm 85 today, "Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation."

Jesus, I trust in you.

Amen.