

Missionary Commentary

Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
July 14, 2024

Sunday Readings

Amos 7:12-15
Psalm 85:9-14
Ephesians 1:3-14
Mark 6:7-13

[USCCB Link to the Readings](#)

Our “Jesus Option” -- Serving the Poor

Today’s first reading is taken from the prophet Amos, known as the “prophet of social justice.” He warns against anyone who tramples upon the needy and destroys the poor. The Church continues to challenge us to make a clear “preferential option for the poor.” This is more than just a nice-sounding phrase or a clever play on words. Today we seek to understand this important dimension of living our Christian faith.

A Unique Phrase. When speaking about the “option for the poor” we are in the area popularly known as “Catholic Social Teaching.” This vision of the Church concerns the human person in society and covers all spheres of life—political, personal, social, economic, and spiritual. At the center of this teaching is the inviolable dignity of the human person; it includes a holistic approach to human development and a just structuring of society.

Brief History. The phrase “preferential option for the poor” was first used in 1968 by Jesuit Father Pedro Arrupe. The term was later picked up by the Catholic bishops of Latin America. Pope John Paul II used the term, expanding its use to include spiritual as well as material poverty. Pope Benedict XVI embraced this option as a true Catholic obligation.

Pope Francis. Francis follows the same preferential option. One can simply recall the theme of his 2015 visit to the Philippines: *Mercy and Compassion*. In Tacloban City, the “ground zero” of a devastating typhoon, Francis said: “If today all of us are gathered here, fourteen months after the passage of Typhoon Yolanda, it is because we are certain that we will not be disappointed in our faith, for Jesus has gone before us. In his passion, he took upon himself all of our sorrows.”

Scriptural Basis. In several important aspects, Jesus himself can be seen as one of the “poor.” He “emptied himself” to share our humanity (Phil 2:7); he became a native of a despised village (Jn 1:46); he was known as the lowly carpenter’s son (Mt 13:55). Jesus resisted the temptation to carry out his mission through the use of glory and power (Mt 4:5-10); note his “mission advice” in today’s gospel. He was the innocent victim of persecution and was executed after an unjust trial.

Jesus’ Ministry. In his public ministry, we see that Jesus is God’s mercy in person; his is a ministry of compassion for the little, lonely, least, lost, and last of society. His parables show his identification with the poor, e.g. Good Samaritan (Lk 10: 29-37), Lost Sheep (Lk 15:4-7), Lost Son (Lk 15:11-32).

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Final Judgment. In the Last Judgment narrative, Jesus directly identifies himself with the poor and needy; he says: “I tell you solemnly, as long as you did it to one of these least brethren of mine, you did it to me” (Mt 25:40). The Gospels are filled with examples of Jesus’ own “option for the poor” of his day! We pray for the grace to daily follow the “Jesus option” in our personal lives!

Notes on the Sunday Readings

First Reading

Amos 7:12-15 – Today’s first reading comes from the earliest writing prophet, Amos (8th century BC). Amos, from the south, preached his uncomfortable message at the northern shrine at Bethel, asserting that his prophesying was God’s doing.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 85:9-14– This psalm reflects the call and task of the prophet: listening to the Lord and then speaking on his behalf.

Second Reading

Ephesians 1:3-14 – Here Saint Paul expresses his mature thought and theology as applied to Christ and the Church, explaining that the divine plan is to bring all things under Christ’s headship.

Gospel

Mark 6:7-13 – Here we find Jesus’ “traveling instructions” for the twelve. In short, they are sent out as poor, simple, generous men. Traveling “light” means being available and flexible to meet other’s needs. Such is our calling as we travel through this life.

Notes and Commentary by Maryknoller James Kroeger, author of [Walking with Pope Francis: The Official Documents in Everyday Language](#) (Orbis Books – 2023), which recently won First Place from the Catholic Media Association in the category for “Books on Pope Francis.”

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As the Father has sent me, so I send you.
JOHN 20:21

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