

**Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year B
(July 16, 2006)**

Called and Sent

Two words occur to me as I look at the readings for this Sunday: called and sent. Called and sent, like the prophet Amos and like the apostles.

Amos was called like all the prophets, and like all the prophets he experienced the common lot of prophets: rejection.

You know what a prophet is: someone who speaks for or on behalf of someone else. In the biblical context, the prophets spoke, of course, on behalf of God. Their main task was not to predict the future, but to confront a people, whether it be kings or commoners, with the unpleasant truth that they had strayed from the ways of the Lord, from the Covenant. They were not foretellers, although they might occasionally have foreseen calamity as a result of the people's hardness of heart. We might call them rather forth-tellers. Their job was to tell it like it is, and for that they got into trouble. Like Ezekiel, whom we heard about last week, whose message of retribution found a very difficult audience; like Amos, who tells us he was a simple shepherd who grew sycamore trees on the side, but who became the prophet of social justice, denouncing those who were getting rich at the expense of the poor. Sounds pretty contemporary, doesn't it?

No wonder they got into trouble. They were a threat to the powers that be and to those who were all for maintaining the status quo when that was profitable for them but harmful for others.

Yes, it's no wonder they were rejected, scorned, persecuted, even killed for what they preached. And that's why they were generally very reluctant to answer God's call.

You remember Isaiah. "Woe is me, I am a man of unclean lips among an unclean people." So God sent an angel with a burning coal to touch his lips and purify him, and when he heard God say, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for me?" he answered, "Here I am. Send me."

Or Jeremiah, the stutterer who protested when God called him, "I can't talk." God said, "Don't worry. I'll take care of you." Jeremiah said, "I'm too young." God said, "Don't worry. I'll take care of you." And when

God put his own words on the lips of that young man who stuttered he suddenly became eloquent and fearlessly delivered the message God gave him to preach.

An angel told the prophet Ezekiel to eat a scroll on which was written the word of God, and when Ezekiel had devoured the word of God it became so much a part of him that he could not *not* speak, no matter how unwelcome the message or the danger to himself for preaching it.

In the Gospel Jesus had called the twelve to be apostles, and now he sends them out to preach the good news, to drive out demons, and to cure the sick. He tells them to take with them only what is necessary, not to be weighed down by excess baggage. The mission and the message are too important, and there must be no hindrances. He warns them that they, too, like the prophets, will be rejected. But they should not be discouraged, nor should they waste time with people who do not want to listen to them, but move on because there are many others who are hungry for the word of God.

It was not only the prophets of old or the apostles who were called and sent. God called Ignatius of Loyola and sent him, saying, "Show my people how to pray." To Dorothy Day, herself with no roof, God said, "Shelter the homeless." And to Mother Teresa, tiny nun and teacher from a small town in Albania, "Go, take care of my lepers."

And what about us? How does God call and send us? Because God surely does. In our baptism we were anointed priest, prophet, and king, just as Jesus was. As followers of Jesus we are a priestly people, a prophetic people, a kingly people. What does that mean? As priest we are called to offer sacrifice. Together we celebrate the Eucharist. As king we care for God's people. That was the primary responsibility of the Kings of Israel. But as prophets we proclaim the word of God – the authentic word of God, not just the latest fad in religious rhetoric. To do that we have to do something like what Ezekiel did. We have to devour the word of God. We have to read sacred scripture. We have to ponder it. We have to pray it. It must become so much a part of us that, again, like Ezekiel, like Isaiah, like Amos, yes, like Jesus and the apostles, Ignatius of Loyola, Dorothy Day, and Mother Teresa of Calcutta, we cannot *not* proclaim it.

Our proclamation will probably be less by way of speech than by way of action. We will proclaim the word of God by how we live the word of

God.

I'm sure you have heard the story of St. Francis of Assisi sending his friars out on mission. He told them to preach the word of God, to constantly preach the word of God, and never cease preaching the word of God. If necessary, he told them, use words – but only if necessary. St. Francis obviously felt his friars would more effectively preach the word of God by how they lived than by what they said. And I think the same is true of us.

As we pray and ponder the word of God today, we ask for the grace, the strength, the courage, to respond as Isaiah did: Here I am, Lord. Send me!