

**Catholic Church of the Beatitudes
Santa Barbara, CA**

Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – July 14, 2012

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Reflections on **Amos 7:12-15; Ephesians 1:3-14; Mark 6:7-13**

The theme of all three of today's readings seems pretty clear to me. That theme is *what it means to be chosen*.

Do you remember when you were a child and you were with a group—the neighborhood kids or your classmates—when you all decided to play a game? The first thing was to choose who would be on whose side. Do you remember that feeling of anxiety before someone chose you to be on their team? And do you remember feeling such relief and joy when you were chosen?

It isn't surprising that children have all those feelings around being chosen. It is important to us developmentally to be part of a team with others. Being chosen affirms us, and acknowledges our gifts; it is a sign that we are valued and wanted by others.

But the joy that comes from the experience of being chosen isn't just for children. For one example, this past week the chairman of an organization asked me to take his place and lead a difficult meeting. When he asked me to do that, some of that great feeling of being chosen came back to me. And honestly, when he chose me it did affirm my abilities, increase my confidence, and energize me to do the assignment. Even at my age, I suppose I still need those developmental nudges.

So let's consider today's readings.

In the gospel Jesus chooses his successors by organizing his apostles into teams of two. He affirms their abilities to follow in his footsteps. He has confidence that they will be able to do the amazing healing work that he

has done throughout the land of Israel. He gives them the awesome power of authority over unclean spirits. He sends them out into the world to preach repentance.

Of course, before all that missioning happened, the apostles were chosen by Jesus in the first place. As the gospels tell it, the choosing seemed to happen almost randomly. Jesus was walking along the Sea of Galilee, and he saw Andrew and Peter and said, "Follow me." Others who were hanging around listening to him, he invited to "Come and see!" He went to dinner at Mathias' home, and the next thing you know, Mathias became his apostle, Matthew. All these can be read as pretty casual invitations. But—something in those invitations came across to the apostles as such a strong call that they were willing to leave their work and their homes and completely change their lives. I believe that, early on, they had a feeling that Jesus' invitation—his call to them—meant they were being chosen for something really compelling. But it was only a lot later, *after* the resurrection, that they realized what a truly amazing team they had been chosen for.

The First Reading certainly emphasizes the life-altering effects of being chosen. Amos is doing the work of prophecy—not easy work by any means. The priest of Bethel tells him, "Go away! Clear out of here – you're not wanted!" But Amos responds that it wasn't *his* idea to be a prophet. In fact, he was happily engaged in the solitary trades of being a shepherd and gardener. But God had other plans. God chose Amos and told him to

“Go, prophesy to my people, Israel.” There was so much power in God’s choosing him that Amos left his flocks and trees and completely changed his life.

In the second reading, from the Letter to the Ephesians, St. Paul says very clearly that “God ... chose us in Jesus ... to be holy and without blemish. In love he destined us for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ.” And later in that letter he repeats: “*we* were also chosen...and were sealed with the Holy Spirit.” Wow! Chosen, and destined, and sealed with the Holy Spirit! How affirming and confidence-building and GREAT is that?

But, hold on. There’s more to all this than the great feeling that comes from being chosen. In order to complete the circle, those who are chosen need to acknowledge the choice . . . and act on it. If not, the team is incomplete and the game can’t go on.

Imagine that, after Jesus chose them to go forth, all the two-man teams of apostles said “Thank you so much, Jesus. It feels great that you’d give us those powers and send us forth to do your work. But we know people won’t accept us. We really can’t heal the blind and the deaf and the lame and drive out demons. *You* can do those things, but *we* can’t. We’ll just go on back to Galilee now. Good-Bye.”

Imagine that Amos had said to God, “It feels great to be chosen to be a prophet to your people Israel. But I’ve read the Holy Books and I know that a prophet’s life is a very hard one. Thanks anyway, but I think I’ll stay with my sheep and my sycamore trees.”

Imagine that, instead of finishing his letter to the Ephesians as he did, St. Paul had written something like this: “Even though we were chosen and sealed in the Holy Spirit, we all decided that our lives are small and meaningless and totally unconnected from the purpose of the One who accomplishes all things. We give thanks for the vision of greatness, but we are not great.”

Saddest of all, imagine that even though *we* have been chosen by God; even though *we* have been taught and commissioned by Jesus; and even though *we* have been sealed by the Holy Spirit, we refuse to act with vision and power, and with the purpose that those choices bring us.

Let us resolve to be the people God has chosen us to be. Let us be hopeful and merciful. Let us tirelessly work for justice and peace. Let us gratefully and willingly join God’s team. And let us play the game of life with all our might.