**Homily for the 15th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year B**

**July 11, 2021**

**St. Bavo Parish**

**Rev. Peter J. Pacini, C.S.C.**

*First Reading: Amos 7:12-15 (The Lord took me and sent me to prophesy to my people.)*

*Responsory: Psalm 85 (Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation.)*

*Second Reading: Ephesians 1:3-14 (God chose, adopted and sealed us for the praise of his glory.)*

*Gospel: Mark 6:7-13 (Jesus sends out his disciples with no provisions.)*

Sometimes it appears that the Lord deliberately sets up his servants to fail. For example, last week we heard God say to his prophet Ezekiel, “These rebellious people have never listened to me; they’re probably not going to listen to you, either. But, go and preach to them, anyway.” The Prophet Amos faced a similar challenge. The Lord snatched him away from his former way of life, as a shepherd and a dresser of sycamore trees, and told him: “Go, prophesy to my people Israel.” There was just one catch, which the Lord neglected to mention. He was sending Amos to preach a message of *social justice* to people who were very content with their comfortable lifestyle and were not the least bit concerned about the exploitation of the poor and the powerless. The Lord obviously knew that Amos would face fierce opposition and rejection, yet he sent him to preach, anyway. That seems like a common theme, which runs throughout the prophetic books of the Old Testament.

In a similar manner, as Jesus sends out his disciples to preach and heal diseases and drive out demons, he appears to go out of his way to make *their* task more difficult, too. He expressly forbids them to take any food, money, extra clothing, or anything else, except sandals and a walking stick. He also seems to know that some places will *not* welcome them. However, in those cases, Jesus recommends that they simply shake the dust off their feet and move on to the next town, rather than wasting their breath on people who refuse to listen. So, it’s not exactly like the prophets of old, but still, it seems very odd that Jesus would want to put his disciples in such a tough position.

There must be a rational explanation for Jesus’ unusual instructions. First, we should note that the disciples *did*, in fact, *succeed* in their mission. Mark says: “They went off and preached repentance. The Twelve drove out many demons, and they anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.” That’s exactly what was supposed to happen. I guess it didn’t matter that the disciples had to do things the hard way. Apparently, the word of God and the authority granted to them by Jesus were sufficient to fulfill their mission. They didn’t need anything else. Maybe, the best way to prove that point to them was by taking everything else away.

In addition, there could be a more profound reason for sending out the disciples seemingly ill-equipped for the task ahead. Because the disciples’ vulnerability was so obvious to everyone, their great success testified to a power greater than themselves. The wonders that they were able to accomplish clearly were not their own doing. Hence, every cure, every exorcism, every conversion gave glory to *God*, not to the disciples themselves. And that’s a key point, not just for the Twelve, but for all of us who bear the name of “Christian,” even today. Our lives are meant to praise and glorify God. All the good that we do in the Lord’s name adds to that glory and praise. But, when we are at our weakest and most vulnerable, that’s often when the power of God working in us is *most* impressive and awe-inspiring.

Today’s second reading explores that idea of our Christian lives giving praise and glory to God. It comes from the opening “thanksgiving” section of the Letter of Saint Paul to the Ephesians. The complicated sentence structure is pretty hard to follow, especially as we try to *listen* to it, as opposed to reading the text. However, one key phrase keeps returning again and again: “for the praise of his glory.”

The first instance is when Paul describes how God created us, with the intention of “adopting” us as his own children. He says that the Father destined us in love for adoption to himself, “for the praise of the glory of his grace…” In other words, our spiritual adoption, which happens through the Sacrament of Baptism, brings glory to God. That’s not how we ordinarily think of Baptism. We generally understand the effects of Baptism as glorifying *those who are baptized*, by granting us a new identity and a special dignity that comes with being a Christian. However, Paul suggests that *God* also is glorified by this ontological change in us, perhaps because his grace shines through us for all to see, or perhaps just because the number of God’s beloved children increases.

The second time the phrase is used is when Paul says that we Christians were “chosen” and “destined” in accord with God’s will, “so that we might exist for the praise of his glory…” Here Paul is going well beyond his previous claim that our spiritual adoption glorifies God. He is no longer describing just an effect of Baptism or a grace that results from God’s blessing. He is actually claiming that the praise of God’s glory is the *very reason why we exist*! The old Baltimore Catechism used to teach little Catholic boys and girls that the purpose for which we were created was “to know, love and serve God.” Paul is suggesting that it might be more accurate to say that we were created “to *praise* and *glorify* God.”

Finally, at the very end of the passage, where Paul speaks about us hearing the word of truth and believing in the gospel, he says that “we were sealed with the Holy Spirit… to the praise of his glory.” That seal of the Holy Spirit, which we receive through the Sacrament of Confirmation, preserves and protects us for the Christian journey. As such, it enables us to realize the great potential hidden inside each one of us from our creation, to embody the very holiness of God. The more we approach that goal, the more our being glorifies the One who made us and raised us up to the dignity of his beloved children.

In summary, God created us *to praise his glory*, adopted us as his beloved children *to praise his glory*, and sealed us with his Holy Spirit *to praise his glory*. In other words, to praise God’s glory is our purpose and our destiny as Christians. We might think that we accomplish that goal primarily through our righteous deeds, but Paul reminds us that we glorify God most of all *simply by being who we are*. We go out into the world, ill-equipped for the task of discipleship, yet the power of God flowing through us manages to do wondrous things, anyway. And, the weaker and more vulnerable that we are, the clearer it becomes that our accomplishments praise and glorify *God’s* name, and not our own.