

Today's readings continue to remind us of our mission, our mission as prophets in the world. For those who did not get to hear my homily last week, I stated that we are all called to be prophets, it is a call that is rooted in our baptism, when we are made priest, prophet and king.

And in today's readings we learn a little about that call to be a prophet. In the first reading, Amos is kicked out of Bethel, and he is kicked out because he is preaching a message of repentance. He is warning the people that God is angry, and is ready to pass judgment on the people. God is upset with the complacent, with the violent and with those who are living a life of luxury. So God sends Amos to these people, and has Amos warn them that God is planning to crush their house of luxury and turn it into rubble. And you know what, the people don't like that. They tell Amos to leave and bring his prophesy somewhere else where it is wanted.

Now Amos responds to this by saying, "Hey, do you think I chose to do this? Do you think I like having to deliver this message. No way, this isn't my message, this isn't my job. I'm not doing this to earn a living? I'm not a professional prophet or some religious guru, I'm just shepherd. I would much rather be out tending my sheep than doing this. But God has called me, and so I am telling you this for your own good."

Now this story reminds us about our origins as prophets. So often we think that we chose to be Christians, or that we choose to be Catholic. As if it is something that comes from us. But these readings remind us that our call comes from God. So we have to put aside our own desires, our preferences and preach the message of repentance that God has entrusted to us.

This sentiment is also echoed in the Gospel. Jesus called his disciples, they did not choose him. And he sent them out on a mission. What is even more interesting, how he sent them out. They were to take nothing of their own. No money, no food, no sack. They were to empty themselves of all their stuff, of their agendas. But you know what is even more interesting is what they were required to take - and that is a friend, a fellow disciple. They were to be in community. This would ensure that they would not preach their own message, but that they would preach the message from God, even when this message was difficult to preach.

As people called by God to be prophets, we need to learn from these scripture stories. We need to remember that we are called to preach not our own message, not our own vision for the world, but the vision that was set forth by God Himself.

And thanks be to God for that. Because if our message were from us, how easy would it be for us to fall into the trap of simply catering to the desires of the world. How easy would it be for us to seek popularity rather than truth? And in fact, many people do this. Even many Catholics do this. How often do you hear Catholics preaching not the message of God, but their own message. There are Catholics who claim that the Bishops have no authority to teach on moral issues. There are Catholics who claim that abortion is not sinful. There are Catholics who claim that our patriotism should prevent us from criticizing our military operations. And I could go on and on, but my point is this: when we cease to listen to God, and instead operate out of our own desires, or even worse, when we simply cater to people so that we can be popular, we do a great disservice to ourselves and the world. We abandon the Truth and in doing so, we often condone what is objectively wrong. We cease to live

up to our call to be prophets. We cease to be like Amos, or like the disciples who preached repentance, and instead we preach that it is God who needs to repent. Now think about that for a second. How often do we want God to repent. We decide we don't like his commands on contraception or sex outside of marriage, or any number of other issues, and so we change them, or deny that these are actually his commands. But in doing this, we have sold the truth for a bunch of lies. And when we do this, we have bankrupted our faith. It ceases to have value.

Such a treatment of our faith reminds me of a story Pope Benedict tells in his book *Introduction to Christianity*. He likens the watering down of faith to the story of Clever Hans. Clever Hans finds a lump of gold. He is talked into trading this gold for a horse, which he in turn exchanges for a cow, a pig, a goose and a whetstone. At the end, he discards the stone as worthless. When we begin to exchange Truth for convenience, or because it offends others, we are trading away the gold of our faith, and sooner or later we will end up with stone that we will simply throw away as worthless.

This is why, in his encyclical letter released this week, the Pope stresses that charity and love can only be found in truth. As prophets, we must remember this. Often times people think that love and charity simply mean being nice and not offending others. But that is not charity. True charity means sharing the Truth, and calling others to live in that truth. It means preaching that we, and not God, need to repent. The Pope has begun this preaching in his encyclical where he discusses the growing inequality among the rich and poor in developed nations such as the U.S., and calls us to a more equal distribution of wealth. He calls nations that promote contraception and abortion as goods and not evils to repent from this view. He reminds us that we are called to uphold beauty of marriage and the family as these correspond to the deepest needs and dignity of the person.

Let us follow the example laid forth by the Holy Father. Let us respond to God's call to be prophets to our world, and call the world to repentance. Let us put aside our own desires, and preach the Truth that comes from God and has been safeguarded by the Church for nearly two millennia so that we too, will truly be able to fulfill our mission to be prophets like Amos and the disciples.