

Sermon Amos 5 6 15 20th Sunday after Pentecost Series B

Sermon: 20th Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Amos 5:6-15 (vv. 6a, 14, 15)

Theme: Seek the Lord!

Goal: To seek the Lord means a radical change of life: repentance (turn from the wicked way) and faith (following God's will).

Dear Friends,

Introduction: The people of Israel enjoyed a good standard of life and peace at the time of Prophet Amos (in the Old Testament).

Prosperity and wealth were common in many families. The King Jeroboam II was beloved by his people and had several alliances with some of his neighbour countries. The land was producing good crops, even enough to be exported and to bring more wealth to the country. Some of the powerful countries around Israel were in crises and they didn't represent threat to Israel for now. But this good, comfortable financial and peaceful situation led the people far from the true God. Instead of being thankful to God for all the blessings they were receiving, they relied on their wealth and on their power. – The history just repeats itself and we know similar situations of countries and of people nowadays. Nothing new under the sun...

I – Far from God: Consequences

Without honouring God and following His way, the other ways become corrupted. If you don't fear God, you don't fear anyone. And you become self-sufficient and selfish, taking decisions according to your own corrupted will.

The first consequence of this wicked behaviour of the king and of many people mentioned in our text is injustice. The Lord accuses the people: "You who turn justice into bitterness and cast righteousness to the ground... you hate the one who reproveth in court and despise him who tells the truth." The court was not a reliable place anymore,

and the judges were judging according to their own interest, and not with impartial justice. *They corrupted the procedures and institutions of justice (the courts), making them instruments of injustice (bitterness)*. *Turning God's order upside down is inevitable in a society that ignores His law and despises true religion* (CSSB 1358).

The second one is corruption: "You oppress the righteous and take bribes." How many leaders of great and famous nations and institutions nowadays are accused of corruption and of taking bribes? Maybe the most famous cases are Mr. Sepp Blatter from the FIFA; and the Petrobras scandal in Brazil. Some are taken to court, even to the International Criminal Court - ICC; but few are really condemned. Bribes over bribes hide the truth.

The third consequence of a wicked behaviour far from God is to ignore the needs of the poor: "You trample on the poor and force him to give you grain... you deprive the poor of justice in the courts." – "The poor you will always have with you" said Jesus. But this doesn't mean that you can ignore them, exploit them or oppress them. Not all people have the same opportunity or chance in their lives, and some don't have the skills and the capacity to get out of their poverty; they are just used to and do not want to change their style of life. Some have been living in the streets for generations. - On the other hand, we know that wars, exploitations, natural disasters and other reasons lead people to poverty. Some lose all they had. Can we close our eyes to the needy? Can we exploit the poor? Never!

The oppressors may feel free to throw out God's standards, but God reminds them of who He is (ABC 1036). God was angry, very angry with the people of Israel due to these common and private bad behaviours. *But the Lord does not want to destroy them, and so He*

appeals through Amos to the people of Israel to repent and thus save their lives (ABC 1036). God said through Prophet Ezekiel (18:23): “Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?” And the reading of Hebrews for today admonishes us: “See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God... Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts” (Hebrews 3:12, 15).

II – Close to God: Consequences

Therefore God calls people back to Himself through the Prophet Amos: “Seek the Lord and live... Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the Lord God Almighty will be with you.”

God takes the initiative to call us to repentance, as He did in the New Testament through John the Baptist, through Jesus Himself and through the apostles. Before Jesus went back to heaven, He said to His disciples: “Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in my name to all nations” (Luke 24:47). Without a repentant heart we cannot follow Jesus. We cannot call ourselves Christians and follow our own wicked way of injustice, corruption and despising the poor. To repent means to turn from the wicked way we are following and to follow Jesus by faith, loving God and loving each other.

“Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. Perhaps the Lord God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Israel.” *What God wanted was for the people to repent and actively seek Him. This was their only hope of survival. This message is repeated three times in this chapter (5:4, 6, 14-15). Even though God was judging the nation, individuals could still repent and live* (ABC 1036). We know from the history that Israel as a nation did not turn back to God and was condemned. The nation was defeated in a war and taken to exile. But a remnant was saved. God accomplished His promise to Abraham,

Isaac and Jacob and always saved a remnant, so that from this remnant the Messiah would be born. And so it happened when Jesus was born to conquer forgiveness for all and to give eternal life to all who believe and follow Him through the right paths of justice and love, “hating what is evil and loving what is good”. *The justice and mercy for which he calls are not things of themselves, but the fruit of healthy, faith-relationships with God* (Phil Brandt, p.12).

Conclusion: We also live among a “wicked and adulterous generation” (Matthew 16:4), as Jesus called the people of His time. We were rescued by Jesus and cleansed in the water of our Baptism. We are in the world but we are not of the world (John 17:16). We are new creatures “created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepare in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10).

It seems that there is not much hope for many corrupted governments and leaders of the world. We see things growing from bad to worse every day. We pray for our political leaders, even the worst ones that we may live in peace according to God’s will. - But there is always hope for individuals. God calls one by one to His Kingdom and He preserves His remnant faithful to Him in faith and deeds. *Right worship must be connected to right living* (ABC 1037).

We cannot just point our finger to the others; but we have to look inside our hearts and acknowledge that we are by nature corrupted and without the true love and care for others as well. Through daily repentance we seek refuge in the Only One who calls us and who can help us: Jesus Christ. Listening to His voice, receiving His forgiveness, strengthened by His Holy Communion, we grow in faith in Him and in love to our neighbour. “Seek the Lord and live”. Amen.