

## Homily Resources – 15 Sunday in Ordinary Time – 15 July, 2018

Readings: 1<sup>st</sup> Am 7:12-15; 2<sup>nd</sup> Eph 1:3-14; Gospel: Mk 6:7-13

**1. Central Thought:** The central thought in these readings is the prophetic mission of the people of God. On this particular year, when we are celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of “*Humanae Vitae*”, we are also focusing on the prophetic mission to be holy, especially in our marriages and in our sexuality.

In the first reading, the prophet Amos was called as a foreigner to prophesy repentance to the people of the Northern Kingdom (Israel). How difficult it is to prophesy the judgment and guidance of God! Amaziah, the chief priest of the north, at Bethel, tried to run Amos out of Israel. Amos said to Amaziah,

“I was no prophet, nor have I belonged to a company of prophets; I was a shepherd and a dresser of sycamores. The Lord took me from following the flock and said to me, Go, prophesy to my people Israel.

2. Unfortunately, not included in the selection for Mass is the response from Amos describing **the consequences of Amaziah’s refusal to listen to the prophet of God.** He said,

“Your wife shall be made a harlot in the city, and your sons and daughters shall fall by the sword; Your land shall be divided by measuring line and you yourself shall die in an unclean land; Israel shall be exiled far from its land.

**3. How difficult it is to tell what really is the prophecy that comes from God!** Look at the first six chapters of the book of Amos! It is unqualified criticism and condemnation for the evils of Israel. How well do people (we) respond to such. Yet that is how evil it was.

**4. In the second reading from St Paul, our Bishop emphasizes that God is calling us to be *holy and without blemish*,** so that we can be part of the great summing up of all things in Christ. Let’s look more at that word, “holy”. Christians often use that word “holy” without much attention. We have Holy Mass, Holy Orders, the Holy Spirit. We are part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. We invoke the Saints, which is just another word for “holy ones.” We use the term so often that we are likely to forget just how radical the word is.

**5. “Holy” means “set apart,” as in a person, place, or thing that is “set apart” for God; a person, place, or thing that is *dedicated to God.*** So we have holy places, like a church building, which is set apart from other buildings. We don’t use churches like any other old building. Churches are set apart, dedicated to God, so we use church buildings for things that are for God. The same is true of the items on the Altar for Mass. The Chalice is set apart, dedicated to God. We don’t drink coffee or coke out of it. The same is true of the Holy Eucharist, the Body of Christ. If it were to fall to the ground or be stepped on, how horrible would it be?

**6. Therefore, God cares how we use our souls and our bodies in every instant because we who are baptized are dedicated to God. God actually owns us because “we have been bought at a price”.** Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit...and we are not our own” (1 Cor 6:20). So we have been set apart. As Catholics we look different. We do different things. This is true of every aspect of Catholic life. That means it is *definitely* true of matrimony. That is why we call it “Holy Matrimony.” Catholic marriages are supposed to look different than marriages of non-Catholics. They are supposed to be images of the plan of God, even of God’s love of the Church, of God’s total, faithful, free, and fruitful love for the Church.

7. Following Bishop Strickland’s call for a return to the Catholic understanding of Holy Matrimony and human sexuality, to God’s understanding of Holy Matrimony and human sexuality, **let’s turn to our Church’s understanding of the most intimate acts between a husband and wife.** This, too, is part of God’s vision for making married couples holy, set apart for Him, totally dedicated to Him, in the sacrament of Holy Matrimony.

**8. When a couple gets married, they give themselves entirely to each other.** And with that, they give each other the exclusive right to acts that are *per se* apt for procreation. That means that every time a husband and wife come together in the marital embrace, that act renews their commitment to be united to each other. It also means that the marital act must always, each and every time, be open to life.

**9. In *Humanae Vitae*, Blessed Pope Paul VI describes this as the *unitive meaning and the procreative meaning of the marital act.*** The marital act *unites* the couple together and is *open to life*. If the marital act truly unites the couple and is open to procreation, that act is part of how the couple becomes holy.

**10. But the opposite is also true.** Any pseudo-marital act that does not result in true union of the spouses or rejects the possibility of procreation is contrary to God's understanding of Holy Matrimony. Any act of contraception prevents procreation and the true union of the couple. **Such acts are not holy, but are sinful, gravely sinful.**

**11. Here we come across a common objection.** Perhaps you have heard it. The objection is this: "Just because a married couple uses contraception doesn't mean they are not open to life. Can't married couples use contraception, so long as they intend, at some point, to have children? Then they are still open to life." While this might seem reasonable at first, it doesn't really work. A person might not tell lies often, but a lie is still a sin, even if that person is honest most of the time. Or if a priest, most of the time, consecrates the Eucharist at Mass, but sometimes doesn't consecrate the Eucharist at all, those bad Masses are still very sinful, and everyone would know it! Overall, he wants to consecrate the Eucharist, so he must consecrate the Eucharist at Mass every time. In the same way, every time the couple enters into the marital act, that act must be open to life. Otherwise, that act is reduced merely to pleasure and even objectification. Catholics must never desecrate the Holy Eucharist. And Catholics must never profane Holy Matrimony by treating sexuality as the world does.

**12. Let's return to thinking about prophecy and the prophetic office.** Amos told the Israelites what they needed to hear. How was he rejected! When Pope Paul VI told the Catholic Church (and indeed all Christians) what they needed to hear, how was he rejected, how was he ridiculed? And what terrible consequences have been visited upon western Christendom because of our rebellion.

**13. What did Pope Paul VI say would be the consequences of embracing artificial contraception? See #17 of *Humanae Vitae*.**

1. Artificial birth regulation opens an easy road to conjugal infidelity and to a general lowering of morality.
2. This especially leads the young to promiscuity and pre-marital sexual activity.
3. Men will not care so much for the physical and psychological well-being of their wives, but consider her just a mere instrument of selfish enjoyment, and no longer his respected and beloved companion.
4. This will allow governments and rulers to impose whatever method of limiting births to be most effective (think China). "In this way, men, while wishing to avoid the individual, family or social difficulties they encounter in observing the divine law, would come to place at the mercy of the intervention of public authorities the most personal and most private sector of conjugal intimacy".

**14. I would add several more personal observations** that Pope Paul VI did not make and have become clearer during the fifty ensuing years.

1. By separating procreation and the unitive significance of the marital act (1968), it has opened the door to approving abortion (1973 USA), and to allowing relationships between people of the same sex to be defined as marriage (2013, 2015 USA).
2. It, therefore, is a primary cause of the population and cultural collapse of western society. No western nation is reproducing enough to sustain itself and must rely on foreign immigration to sustain its working population.
3. I would further argue that the self-indulgence in sexual pleasure without apparent consequences has led to a culture of self-indulgence and immediate gratification in which drug culture is tolerated, in which work discipline is lessened, a culture where less than 63% of the population is actually working, and in which we have produced more jobs to be fulfilled, 6.6 M versus 6.2M unemployed

**15. It appears to me that this acceptance of artificial contraception is a recipe for disaster.** Just as Amos prophesied the degeneracy and collapse of Israel because of its evil, so Pope Paul VI prophesied the consequences for us of approving artificial contraception. It is to our Bishop's credit that he is raising this issue at this time and prompting us to study this book!

**16. We have a choice.** We can choose to be like Amaziah, the condemned priest of Bethel, who told Amos to shut up and to go home, or we can be like the faithful remnant who remain faithful to the teachings of God and His Church! This is why our Bishop is calling us to be a "teaching" diocese. Do we value knowing the wisdom of God?