

The prophetic challenges. (Amos 7:10-15 and Mark 6:7-13; Eph 1:3-14)

* Beloved in the Lord, following the previous way of allegorical saying we again compare ourselves with pilgrims and our Christian life with travel across a fabulous land, green valleys, mountains, rivers, and canyons. The pilgrimage is always associated with moving from one's homeland to the land of his heart's desire. But all trips as usual make us less secure if we are flying, driving or boating because we cannot see ahead all the traps and tricks even if we would be very intelligent. For example, if the pilgrims enter into a desert as wide as two days of walking, but they do not take enough water because of their incompetence, then they may draw troubles upon themselves. Another example, traveling on a riverbank the travelers may be deadly infected by biting mosquitoes as a result of their incompetence; or after the same pattern they may enter into the forest abounding with black tree snakes often having a fatal bite. In fact, the number of threats can be continued, but I think these three examples are good enough to draw a conclusion. So, in order to be protected from unexpected threats, the pilgrims need an advisor, someone from the original inhabitants of the region, a person who would be familiar with the natural environments, who knows how deep, wide and high the challenges are ahead of remote distance and times.

* Now, keeping in mind this insight, let's say something about the lessons for this Eighth Sunday after Pentecost. The readings from (Amos 7:10-15 and Mark 6:7-13) narrate the acts of the prophets; meanwhile the third reading from (Eph 1:3-14) is itself the prophetic writing. The two lessons for today warn us against being careless in accepting God's messengers, and the third reading is the pure sacred teaching from Paul, the prophet and apostle. The Word of God teaches that it is necessary for Christians not to neglect the voice of the Holy Spirit that speaks through the prophets and in these last days has spoken to us in Jesus Christ, the Son of Almighty, (Heb 1:2). As we approach a starting point, let's ask the Lord for guidance and encouragement. We pray, *thank you, dear Blessed Trinity for the giving of ears that can hear and understand your words through your messengers; please, help us to recognize your voice whenever you speak through your prophets, evangelists and teachers. And keep us far from believing to false prophets, evangelists and teachers. Again we thank you for the acceptance as sons and daughters of the one covenant with Abraham and faithful Israel.*

Amen. In return we've heard the voice of our Shepherd, *I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven,* (Mat 8:11).

In return all faithful say, *Alleluia! Thanks be to God.*

* Dear Abraham descendants, even though we are heirs of the kingdom we are not yet reclined at the table with Abraham; by faith we still have to work out of that moment. Here I mean to live victoriously and productively as the sons and daughters of the One Heavenly Father enjoying all benefits we have in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Because of that, the Lord sends his prophets, evangelists, apostles, bishops and pastors in our midst. Through them our Lord urges, warns, admonishes, encourages, blesses and gives us right direction. In turn, we should not neglect the prophets because they are the servants of the Lord and ours as well in order to help us escape from making a shipwreck of faith, (1Ti 1:18,19). The one problem here is that there are many false prophets and teachers in the world; they are constantly tempting us with wrong decisions.

* Today is a proper time to talk about prophetic ministry because the Sunday texts for today are all about that. This sermon is planned to let you test the speaking of truth from two prophets Amos and Paul. Taking our readings in order, the first reading comes from (Amos 7:10-15). It contributes in terms of better understanding the challenges regarding prophetic ministry and the acceptance of that ministry in a local congregation, even though it happened almost 2800 years ago. The reading draws two characters, Amaziah the priest of Bethel and Amos, the prophet from Judea. The one character can be seen as a governor of a local congregation and other as a commissioner from the Heavenly Court.

* On hearing Amos, the priest of Bethel sent a false message to Jeroboam, the king at Samaria. Here is a partial paraphrase of that report. So, Amaziah, the priest wrote, Your Majesty, *Amos is raising a conspiracy against you* in our sanctuary. Amos' speech cannot be heard because he prophesies against you in a very harsh, saying, *Jeroboam shall die by the sword*, also he speaks hard regarding our nation, saying that ... *Israel must go into exile away from his land.* Your majesty, give us an order and we kick him into the bucket.

* But the true Amos' saying is found in the (v.9). The sovereign LORD said to Amos, *the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste, and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.* From this verse it becomes obvious that Amos prophesied against Jeroboam's

dynasty, not against the king as an individual. This statement can be confirmed by the Scripture where it says that Jeroboam died in a good-natured way, (2Ki 14:29). At the same time it says that his son Zachariah was killed by the sword, (2 Kings 15:10). After that the dynasty of Jehu-Jeroboam came to an end. Now it is obvious and it is clear that Amaziah, the priest, is a false messenger; he is a wicked person. He hoped that after hearing his fabrication the king would lose his temper, take revenge, and hopefully might put the prophet to death. On the other hand we found out that the prophet Amos was not the false messenger, since what he said and came true.

* Dear Friends, it is always like that; flesh doesn't want to hear the truth, flesh closes its ears upon hearing God's messengers, and sometimes flesh goes beyond hostility to the very act of violation, (Act 7:59; 12:2). Also it is beyond common understanding why God allows flesh to put His prophets to death, (Mat 23:34b), even his beloved Son. But in spite of hostility and lack of common understanding the process of sending prophets has continued up to the present moment. Even today the Lord sends prophets, wise men, and scribes, (Mat 23:34a). This truth can be proven from media, surveys, books, independent publications including Concordia Publishing House. For example, around 120 pastors were graduated and sent from the Concordia Theological Seminary in Saint Louis in 2008; their number exceeds ten times the number of men who were sent from the beginning, as the gospel reading for today says. *And he (Jesus) called the twelve and began to send them,*(Mark 6:7).

* As far as we've already mentioned the Gospel reading, let's continue to speak on its account. The (Mark 6:7-13) tells about the twelve evangelists whom the Lord set out for a mission.

The significance of this occurrence was found in an identical match between the twelve evangelists and the twelve minor prophets of the OT. First, the same number – 12. Second, the same attitude in taking - no bread, no money, no extra garment. Third, the same behavior in being accepted - whenever you go into a home, stay there until you leave that place. Forth, the same reaction upon non acceptance – the act of shaking dust off from the feet as a testimony against unbelievers; Fifth, the same topic of preaching – the repentance. Sixth, the same miraculous acts – healing sick, casting of demons. Finally the six factors of sameness jump to

conclusion. Seventh, the same general manager – the Son of God, Jesus Christ. He is God of the OT and NT prophets. The Lord continues to govern the elect by sending to them his prophets, wise men and scribes.

* I think the most prominent prophet of all ages is the Apostle Paul; he instructed and taught the Church according to the revelation he communicated from God. (1Co 14:6; Gal 1:12). Also he is known as the most prominent scribe and theologian; he alone wrote almost half the books of the NT. Paul is a wise person about whom Peter said, that our beloved brother Paul is gifted with the wisdom, (2Pe 3:15). No doubt, Paul is the very reliable figure through whom Jesus Christ opened the secret knowledge, so that we know the Way.

For example, through Paul we received knowledge of our salvation by faith alone. The theologians call this revelation - *Solo Fide*. The knowledge and acceptance of are crucially important; it helps us avoid the false teaching regarding salvation by works. I summarized Paul's teaching from (Eph 1:3-14) in one sentence.

This summary covered the things that have already happened in the present time and the things that will happen in the eschatological future. Here is the summary of Paul's theology, *having believed upon hearing the Gospel of our salvation, we were sealed by the Holy Spirit, forgiven and equipped by every spiritual blessings in Christ to live holy and blameless life until the times will have reached the final point of our redemption by brining all in the Christ – both that in the heaven and on the earth together under one head.* Beloved in the Lord, the things that we experience now in our Divine Liturgy is a pretest of the total change we will experience in eternity. Now I beg you, Brothers, hold in high regard what you have and praise the Lord for his prophets. Beloved, peace be with you all. Amen