

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time, 25 September 2022

Scriptures: Amos 6:4-7; 1 Timothy 6:11-16; Luke 16:19-31

Homily: Fr. Ken

The biblical passages for this weekend remind us that for many people it is difficult for them to imagine what life is really like for those who are poor.

If we have ears to hear, we cannot fail to be struck by the message of Jesus. It is uncomfortable. It is disturbing. Indeed, some no doubt are tempted to say that this kind of reflection is political and not religious, and that decisions about standards of living should be left to elected governments. The Church's job is to deal with prayer and liturgy, some would say.

But the Bible tells us something else. The prophet Amos, who provides us with the first reading, spells it out. Amos is not a professional prophet—he doesn't earn his living by uttering prophecies at shrines and sanctuaries. He is an outsider, since his real job is as a shepherd and agriculturalist. People do not expect him to speak in God's name. There is another reason why he is an outsider. The Holy Land is split in two after the reign of King Solomon, and Amos belongs to the southern section, to Jerusalem and its hinterland, which is called Judah. But God sends him to the northern kingdom of Israel, precisely to preach justice.

Amos does this with an aggressive choice of words. He addresses the people of both kingdoms. One of his expressions is: "The Lord is roaring". He does a fair bit of roaring himself. His description of the rich is bitterly sarcastic: ivory beds, luscious meals, drinking, self-indulgent entertainment. "Watch out", he says: exile and deportation are just around the corner. Why? Because you have

lived unjustly, because you have been corrupt, because you have appropriated the land of those who are poor, and reduced them to slavery. "About the ruin of Joseph they do not care at all". In other words, the well-being of the country as a whole is forgotten, because you, the rich, are selfish beyond words.

In the Gospel, St. Luke reminds us that Jesus was equally concerned with social justice. The story of the rich man and Lazarus seems to be about two individuals. The rich man dresses in purple and dines magnificently, while at the gate is Lazarus, starving and covered with sores. But the rich man stands for the ruling class described by Amos; Lazarus stands for the deprived and defrauded peasantry. Jesus underlines sadly the inability of those who are rich to change their ways: "They will not be convinced even if someone should rise from the dead". The Holy Land where Christ lived and taught was full of beggars and penniless immigrants; the well-to-do were the collaborators with the Romans, like Herod, people with hard hearts.

If you look at all of Catholic teaching, you will find that a great deal of it concerns our social responsibilities as mature Christians.

Respect for every human person and human solidarity that is far more engaging than self-interest—these are central to the Church's teaching.

Pope Francis, in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, emphasizes that it is poor people who suffer most when fisheries are depleted, when forests are cut down, when countries in the southern hemisphere are afflicted with unsustainable debt. When we discuss the environment, and tackling global warming and climate change, we should never forget whose health and whose lives are most at stake.

These are religious issues not just secular ones. The Church offers the world our teaching on the Eucharist, our explanation of the Bible, the beauty of the pilgrimage, the rosary, and lovely inspiring music. Catholic social teaching is not an optional add-on

to these. Rather, Catholic social teaching is an integral part of the same religious message. We can thank God that so many of our fellow Christians have taken this to heart. And we can pray that we will never be part of the scandal of conspicuous wealth, while those who are poor cry out to God, "Lord, how long?"