

[Readings: Amos 7:12-15; Psalm 85; Ephesians 1:3-14; Mark 6:7-13]

My homiletics professor in the seminary said that a good homily can be summarized in one sentence. My homily theme is taken from a movie I have never seen, but I remember one scene and one line from it. Robert De Nero in the movie "Taxi Driver" looks in a mirror and says to himself, "You talkin' to ME? You talkin' to ME?" That is the theme of my homily today. All three readings have God "talkin'" to those whom He has called. God is also "talkin'" to you and me as you and I are called to do His will.

If you are a Christian, if you are a Catholic, there is a very good chance that you have been told by someone else at some point in your life, in your past, that "God has a special plan for you." That "God has a special plan for your life." I try to keep tuned in to God as often as I can throughout the day to see what small plans He has for me, and how they fit in the bigger picture of my call to the priesthood and my ministry as your pastor. These words, "God has a special plan for you," can be reassuring words because it means that God is in charge of things and that there is some purpose behind the things that happen to you.

So, what is God's plan for YOU, specifically? And what choice DO you have in all of that? And how does God's plan for your life mesh with God's plans for other people? After all, you're not the only person who's been told that God has a plan for his or her life! God is never too busy to be concerned about the lives of each one of us.

The plan that we hear in our Second Reading is even greater than that. The "predestination" St. Paul talks about is not what some Protestant or Pentecostal theology suggests. "You are already predestined to be either in Group One which goes to Heaven, or Group Two, which goes to Hell. So whatever you do in this life doesn't matter." That's NOT the Catholic understanding. God has predestined us to have eternal life and glory, but it is up to us to respond to that invitation with faithfulness and dedication to our calling. Let's take a look at the kind of people God calls and how they respond in our three Readings.

There is a dramatic difference in the profession of preacher (the apostles in our Gospel), the prophet (Amos, in our First Reading) and St. Paul (in our Second Reading). They are all in three different styles, situations and settings. Just as you and I and all of come with different styles, situations and settings.

Amos is living and working in the kingdom of Israel during the first half of the 8th Century B. C. Amos has no experience as a prophet. He is a shepherd, and a “dresser of sycamore trees,” which means to pinch the fruit on the branches so that it opens up and bears fruit. These sycamore trees are much smaller than the sycamores in our country. Its fruit is small and bitter, but the trees are plentiful in the Middle East. Its fruit is known as poor people’s fruit, for those who cannot afford more exotic or expensive fruit.

But, as young and inexperienced as he is, Amos is still called beyond what he thinks he is capable of doing: “Go and prophecy to my people Israel!”

In the same way, when Jesus summons and sends His apostles to minister, He sends them to places and people unknown to them, without even the barest essentials for their journey. They were not to pack a lunch or even take a snack. They were not to take money, debit cards or travelers checks. They carried no suitcases; they had no hotel reservations. If I had to travel that way, I would just DIE! It took me a 20-foot U-Haul truck just to move me from New Baltimore to Warren!

The Apostles carried nothing, so they had to rely completely on the kindness, generosity and hospitality of the people they would visit. In turn, the gifts they did carry and share with their hosts, were God’s word, God’s forgiveness, and God’s healing. If they were not welcomed, they would shake the dirt off their feet as a sign of judgment. I know a pastor who did this when he left his parish assignment sooner than expected, having had a very poor welcome by those who wanted to see him gone. One or two parishes in the Archdiocese even had three pastors in twelve months! They and their message were not welcome by the communities to which they were sent.

Were you ever placed in a situation where you had to tell someone something that you or they did not agree with, and that disagreement caused a

conflict in your relationship? How did that experience change YOU?

Do you ever think about what sort of life you might have lived, had you not responded to what the Lord is calling you to continue to do and to be? Any regrets? If you are living the life God's wants you to live, there really should not be any regrets. But even if there are, bring them to the Lord. He understands.

My niece asked me one time what was the one thing in my life that God has given me that I have never regretted and that has brought me the greatest satisfaction in my life. I answered that it is this – my vocation to the priesthood and my ministry in the parish. I have not regretted it for one day, because I know that I am doing what GOD wants me to do with my life. Not what I thought I wanted to do with my life. And it is a WONDERFUL life!

St. Paul speaks of us being chosen by God, blessed, loved, holy, and destined for adoption. Do you really believe this? If our very reason for being here in this place and at this time in history is to praise God's glory, how faithful and fruitful are we to that call? Are we doing what we are called to be doing?

We have divine assurance that we are not alone in the call. God is with us. He sustains us with the Food for the journey from Heaven, and with each other. AMEN!