

Eight Pentecost
July 18, 2010
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“In God We Trust.”

Amos, the prophet, lived in the eighth century BC. By that time, the sons of Solomon had divided their father’s kingdom in two, north and south. The southern kingdom became known as ‘Judah’ and the northern ‘Israel’.

Amos was sent as a prophet to the north. He did not have the silky skills of oratory of many of the other prophets. Amos was a farmer. He was rather rough in his ways. In fact, Amos was more than rough, he was fierce. Today Amos is riling against the deceit and greed of merchants, over-charging and rigging their scales and balances. His usual complaint is about the worship of Canaanite Gods in the north. But today, his social conscience comes out and he reacts to all that he sees around him: poverty, injustice, inequality and unfairness. Amos prophesies the coming doom that will fall upon Israel with references to her past. Egypt, the River Nile, the Red Sea are all imagines from her past. In this reading they are linked to the transformation that is to come. Israel will be transformed into mourning, darkness, lamentation, sackcloth, end times, and famine. All of these things will happen because God has been taken out of the life of the nation. For when God’s protection is no longer there, when God’s side of the covenant is removed, the dark shadow of the kingdom of evil takes over.

I suppose we could summarize Amos’ dilemma in the words: “In God We Trust”. The Israelites of the northern kingdom had stopped trusting in God. Without God, they were no longer a special people. They were no longer a chosen people. Without God, Amos predicted that disaster and gloom would overcome them.

Last week, I read an article in the British newspaper, the Daily Telegraph, about a law passed in the European Assembly. It simply banned crucifixes in school classrooms, hanging on walls. Most of us grew up with crucifixes in our schools classrooms. However, Italy in particular has taken exception to this ruling and is upset by it because most of their schools are religious schools.

We have seen this in our own country where God has systematically been removed from many aspects of our community. How long before the only thing on a \$50 note will be the face of President Ulysses S. Grant, with no mention of “In God We Trust”?

We all know that on a personal level, God can all too easily be squeezed out of our lives. Work, family, commuting, pressure, stress and illness can make that happen.

It is not uncommon for me, counseling and talking to people to hear these words: “I can’t pray. No words will come. I find myself distracted. I just can’t seem to fit God into my day.”

There is an experience common to fishermen, artists and knitters. It is an experience of God and an experience of prayer.

“I was sitting by the side of the lake, “ the fisherman told me. “It was a bright, sunny day; a sort of hot lazy day really, with a slight ripple on the water and a lot of reflection.

The fishing was quiet, so I sat back and enjoyed the beauty all around, reeds, grasses, leaves and birds in flight. Two large blue/green dragonflies flew close to the end of my fishing pole. Their two sets of wings swirling made them look as if they were hovering. They made me think of the ‘jolly green giant helicopters’ of Vietnam. I marveled at them and began to think of God. Not the God who created the great expanse of the universe, but the God who could create something as awesome and beautiful as the dragonfly.”

Fishermen get carried away with their thoughts. Fishing and the quiet is like a window into the past. Old friends and especially fathers and uncles begin to talk to you while you are fishing. I am sure that knitters and artists have similar experiences. What all three have in common is that they require time. We don’t spend that quality of time alone any more. Our lives are so frenetic that they rarely allow us to do that.

In a very short time, Mariana, Janine’s niece, will enter the Novitiate of her Roman Catholic Religious Order. Up to now, she has been a postulant, much the same as Maria Von Trapp in the Sound of Music. Now she is entering the Novitiate, a house of preparation and initiation into any order. It is a very special time she will spend there away from the distractions of the world. A Novitiate teaches you about your order and the nature of religious life. It is a life of community, but more it is a time of guidance and searching for God’s will for you. There will be no TV; no movies; outings; few visitors and few phone calls. Mariana wrote to us last week seeking your prayers. She in turn will pray for each and all of us. She would love to have letters but unfortunately they are restricted to immediate family.

If you have no vocation; if God is not calling you to a life of service and prayer in community, the Novitiate will tell you. Because in a Novitiate you will have to find and talk to your God and you must find the quiet, whereby God can talk to you.

It is that last part that we find the most difficult out here in the world. In the Novitiate you have wise and learned people to help you. How can we know what is God’s will for us? We must be sure that our life is directed by God also. Novices learn to submit to authority. They are taught to say ‘no’ to themselves and ‘yes’ to God. They actively seek God and God’s will for them. They study and embrace a rule of life that is their written constitution. It is not a book of restrictions and does and don’ts; it is a book of wisdom that they learn to love, cherish and live by. The rule takes the ‘I’ out of their decision making and replaces it with God’s will for them.

It’s much more difficult for us to do that in our life. That does not mean that we do not have to actively seek God’s will for us. We do that through prayer and attempting to dedicate all we do to his service.

Martha and Mary in today's Gospel story are both serving the Lord, but just in different ways. The story tempts us to ask: "which are we, Martha or Mary?" Well in parish life we need both and most of us are made up of both. As we watch the Daughters of the King today renew their vows and induct three new members into their order, we pray for each and everyone as they rededicate themselves to service and prayer. The Daughters of the King are an order of women within the Episcopal church. Together they seek to deepen their life of prayer and spirituality. In so doing, they help to bring about the mission of the church. It is no accident, that our daughters have as their chapter title: "Marthas and Marys" for they combine both service and prayer. If you have not thought to belong, pray about it.

In today's second reading St Paul tells the Colossians: "I became the Gospel's servant according to God's commission that has been given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations, but has now been revealed to his saints."

Our lives too must reveal Christ – the God we believe in. Sometimes, we make compromises and allow God to be squeezed out. Yet, no matter how busy our lives get, God is still there. Even if "In God We Trust" disappears from our very last American banknote, it must never be allowed to disappear from our hearts.

Amen.+