

## **Sunday, December 8**

Amos 6:1-14 *But you have turned justice into poison and the fruit of righteousness into bitterness—you who rejoice in the conquest of Lo Debar and say, “Did we not take Karnaim by our own strength?”* (v.13 NIV)

Amos was a prophet who spoke against his own people of Israel (the Northern Kingdom). After castigating other nations of the Middle East, including the Southern Kingdom of Judah, which no doubt gratified his hearers (1:1—2:5), he turned his attention to them, and we can assume that their self-satisfaction immediately vanished.

This passage is typical of Amos’s message, and the thirteenth verse illustrates that most insidious sin of pride. Self-love is good so long as it is referred to that greater love, that of God, who made us in His image. Separated from that love, it is like a healthy cell that becomes cancerous. When credit due God is assumed by ourselves, and we rely upon our own strength, we deceive ourselves. We rejoice over nothing, things that have little or no consequences. Much of what our world covets is of this nature.

As Christians, we do well to listen to Amos because we can become complacent in our Christianity. The Church, too, must answer for her sins and offenses. Advent reminds us that when we come to judgment, we shall be judged by how well or how poorly we have followed Jesus—not by how well we have done for ourselves.

Psalms 148, 149, 150; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11; Luke 1:57-68

## **Monday, December 9**

Amos 7:1-9 *So the Lord relented. “This will not happen,” the Lord said.* (v.3)

The message of the prophets is not one of unrelenting doom. If the people turn to God from their sinful ways, they shall be saved. This was the lesson Jonah learned concerning the people of Nineveh.

The prophet may intercede on behalf of the people. Moses did on Mount Sinai after the Israelites made a golden calf and fell into idolatry. And here, God harkens to the plea of Amos to spare the Israelites from starvation.

This relenting on the part of God is not a sign of weakness. God wants to save us. But he will not indulge our sinful ways or force us to repent. The choice is ours. Consequences follow.

Sometimes one good representative of the people—a leader or prophet—can stand in our breach and intercede for the people with success.

God relents in these cases because His nature is mercy and love, not harshness and doom.

Psalm 25; Revelation 1:1-8; Matthew 22:23-33

## **Tuesday, December 10**

Amos 7:10-17 *Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent a message to Jeroboam king of Israel: “Amos is raising a conspiracy against you in the very heart of Israel. The land cannot bear all his words.”* (v.10)

History is rarely predictable. Who would have bet on the uneducated herdsman against the king’s prophet? Wasn’t Amos just another “crazy” with a message, and more than that, a betrayer of his own king and country? Instead, it was Amaziah who departed the same under a curse.

Certain people have been described as shapers of history. To some extent this is true. Moses and Jesus are examples. By hindsight we can see history’s course, and even learn from it.

Psalms 26, 28; Revelation 1:9-16; Matthew 22:34-46

## **Wednesday, December 11**

Revelation 1:17—2:7 *Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first.* (v.4)

In the second and third chapters of Revelation, each of the seven principal churches (congregations) of Asia Minor is given reports from Christ through the author, John of Patmos. The first of these, Ephesus, gets a generally favorable report. What about the one criticism? There is a sense in which we cannot recover an early love. Time passes, things change. We can never reverse the former days. When the Christians at Ephesus first received the Good News, that was a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

Yet the gospel was, and remains, the Good News. There is the danger that churches can become so preoccupied with the business of their affairs, however important, that they lose the desire to encounter Jesus in the challenges of life as well as in the daily rounds of worship and fellowship. They uphold their faith but witness poorly to others about it.

“All things are made new in Christ,” wrote Paul (2 Corinthians 5:14-18). May we not become old, or too settled, in our faith.

Amos 8:1-14; Psalm 38; Matthew 23:1-12

## **Thursday, December 12**

Revelation 2:8-17 *I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.* (vv.9a, 15-16)

The first citation is a reminder that spiritual wealth has little or nothing to do with material wealth or circumstances.

It’s interesting to note that Polycarp, a great saint and martyr of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, was Bishop of Smyrna. The church at Smyrna had a proud role in the early history of Christianity.

The Nicolaitans, also mentioned in 2:6, were a sect that believed that, being new exemptions from Jewish law, they were free to indulge in licentious practices.

As Bishop Stephen Bayne observed in his *Christians Living Love*, we are finally free to choose whom or what we shall serve. Freedom itself if made our absolute, becomes an ideal. We cannot practice Christianity and immorality at the same time; they are opposing masters.

Amos 9:1-10; Psalm 37:1-18; Matthew 23:13-26

### **Friday, December 13**

Revelation 2:18-29 *“Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan’s so-called deep secrets, ‘I will not impose any other burden on you, except to hold on to what you have until I come.’”* (vv.24-25)

We’ve all heard plenty about the desirability of progress. Of course we want to move forward in life. There are times, however, when on our own terms we can’t. An army or a sports team can’t always be on offense. A good defense, at least as much as offensive power, is what wins battles or contests. The ability to hold fast, to protect one’s territory is crucial to victory.

The false prophets were leading some of the congregation at Thyatira astray. As for the others, there was no need to digest new teaching; rather they had only to remain faithful to the apostolic teaching they had already received. That would be defense enough against the deep secrets of Satan.

When you are in situations where it seems there is no progress, we may well be making more progress than when it is visible to us. God is in charge, and if we hold fast to what is truly Christian, we will indeed be moving forward in the divine plan.

Haggai 1:1-15; Psalm 31; Matthew 23:27-39

### **Saturday, December 14**

Matthew 24:1-14 *Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.* (vv.12-13)

This fulfills what was spoken about in yesterday’s reflection. What Jesus tells us in this passage from the Gospel of Matthew is:

1. The struggle will not be easy. Victory over Satan and his forces of evil will not come cheaply. This is similar to those in the Parable of the Sower who are like seed scattered on thin soil, receiving eagerly the word of God and then when the going gets tough, fall away. Endurance, not enthusiasm, on our part is the means to victory.

2. We have Jesus’ promise that final victory will be ours. No matter how dismal or distressing our present condition, in Christ we shall win out if we don’t surrender, as surely as Easter morning followed the darkness of the Friday. That is the word, the fruitful word, of the Sower.

Haggai 2:1-9; Psalms 30, 32; Revelation 3:1-6

*by Matthew Borden*

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