



TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY

CYCLE C

Amos 6:1, 4-7
I Timothy 6:11-16
Luke 16:19-31

GATHERING

(The leader of the session for this week selects and cuts out five or six newspaper articles from recent days that treat the impact of the present economic situation on various groups and individuals. A bible open to this week's reading from Amos is displayed in a prominent place in view of all the members. The newspaper articles are placed in such a way throughout the bible that they visibly stick out from the book.)

As with the lectionary readings of last Sunday this week's three readings come respectively from Amos, I Timothy and Luke. Again we are called to accountability for our use of our own human and economic resources and our solidarity with those stranded on the margins of life and society. Begin this session by sharing with one another what consequence the last gathering of the community had on your stewardship of the gifts at your disposal.

OPENING PRAYER

(Before the opening prayer the leader of the session goes to the bible and reads the headlines and key excerpts from each of the newspaper articles

and then places them back into the bible the way they were first displayed.)

The community sings or prays "The Prayer of St. Francis".

FOCUS QUESTION

How safe do you feel in today's economy?

SCRIPTURE SHARING AND REFLECTION

Amos 6:1, 4-7

I Timothy 6:11-16

Luke 16:19-31

COMMENTARY

"Woe to the complacent in Zion!" These and the words that follow from Amos are strong stuff. The prophet's voice, says Rabbi Abraham Heschel, is always an "octave too high!"

Complacency, however, is probably not a disposition that many of us would acknowledge in the tenuous economic times we experience these days, weeks, months.... In fact it may be quite the opposite. The times are very unsure and consequently so are we. Our jobs are threatened or perhaps they have already been taken from us or from those close to us.

But consider. Is it not the case that most of us gathered in small Christian community have it pretty good? Certainly we are better off than most people before us in history. So many of us have been reasonably well off even while so many are stranded at the margins. Complacency can be a relative thing.

Perhaps the unsettled economic times we face and the vulnerability we feel as a result can sensitize us more to the plight of the truly marginalized in our society. The middle class, the working poor, the destitute all stand together today on the same lines for unemployment compensation and food stamps. The situation invites us to a new sense of solidarity with all our sisters and brothers throughout this society. Could it be that in our time the middle class and the poor might become real *allies*?

Taken together the three readings from this Sunday's liturgy form a symmetrically structured unit. The Pauline charge to "fight the good fight of faith" (i.e., second reading) is framed and contained by two scenes of judgment in the face of injustice (i.e., the first and third readings). As such, "the good fight of faith" can not be taken to be simply an individual matter. The struggle to which the liturgy calls us also involves our commitment to the common good. It summons us to a faith that does justice.

Amos does not condemn seeking after a good life. He condemns its pursuit without regard to its consequences for the nation. Fidelity to God, the prophet reminds us, entails the acceptance of a shared responsibility for the common good. Fidelity is tested by our solidarity with those at the margins.

And listen to Luke. His attention to narrative detail summons a special attention. Notice the portrayal of the appearance of the rich man, the description of fabric (linen) and color (purple). Note too the portrayal of the destitute Lazarus, the details of his sores and the presence of the dogs that lick the man's wounds. What an acute portrayal of opposites.

These details highlight the solidarity of the animals with utterly needy Lazarus. They also highlight the total absence of human solidarity on the part of the complacent rich man with his covenant brother at his gate.

The role of the prophet, it has been said, is to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable; to assure the former that God stands ultimately on their side; to challenge the latter to stand with God on the side of those at the margins.

But Lazarus still lies in misery. And Lazarus is legion!

These times tell us that we have systemic, not just individual economic problems. It behooves us in pursuit of our own self-interest to turn our attention and energy to building a society for the good of all. But even more, Amos, Paul, Luke, and the Lord himself stand before us this week to remind us that we belong to each other. They call us to a faith that does justice for all.

FAITH SHARING AND INTEGRATION

1. With what must you struggle to "fight the good fight of faith"?
2. Where might you find complacency in your life?
3. With whom do you most readily ally yourself, the rich or the poor?
4. What opportunities already exist within your sphere of influence to live a faith that does justice, to speak or act on behalf of those at the margins of society?

RESPONSE IN ACTION

1. Sit down with your newspaper and your bible someday this week for an extended period of time, say a good half hour to forty-five minutes. First, peruse the paper for three stories dealing with the impact of these unsettling economic times on groups or individuals. Second, locate and mark off the three readings from this week's liturgy. Then, slowly and attentively, read first an article from the newspaper, then the first reading, then another article from the paper, and so on....Pause for a while to reflect between each reading.
2. Select a story from the newspaper someday this week that details the impact of these difficult times on groups or individuals. Select also one of the readings from this Sunday's liturgy. Begin a family meal or a meal with friends with a reading of the chosen article and scripture. Invite those at dinner to share their reflections on same and the connections between them and their own life situation these days.
3. Visit an unemployment office this week, whether out of necessity or choice. Stay there for at least fifteen minutes. Perhaps stand on a line for a while. Pay unobtrusive and respectful attention to the presence of so many. Conscious of so much human variety and diversity, pray for a sense of solidarity with these sisters and brothers.

SENDING FORTH AND CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: Praise the Lord, my soul!

All: Praise the Lord, my soul!

Leader: Happy the one who keeps faith forever, secures justice for the oppressed, gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets captives free.

All: Praise the Lord, my soul!

Leader: The Lord gives sight to the blind. The Lord raises up those that were bowed down. The Lord loves the just. The Lord protects strangers.

All: Praise the Lord, my soul!

Leader: The fatherless and the widow he sustains, but the way of the wicked he thwarts. The Lord shall reign forever; your God, O Sion, through all generations. Alleluia!

All: Praise the Lord, my soul!

Leader: Let us pray now for the needs of our world and our church, for the needs of our nation, state and local community, for those who have asked for our prayers, for our families and ourselves. Let us respond to the petitions: "Lord hear our prayer."

(When it seems appropriate the leader brings the prayers of petition to a close by inviting the community to join hands and pray the Lord's prayer.)