

## Homily: July 14, 2024

By Fr. Virgil Petermeier, osc

Pope Francis, in his book, “The Joy of the Gospel,” calls all baptized Catholics to be missionary disciples. Sometimes, we forget, or perhaps even resist, that baptismal call. So, we come to our compassionate God, praying, “Lord, have mercy.”

The first reading and the Gospel are usually tied together by one theme. Today, the theme is that of being proclaimers of God’s word. In addition, both readings prepare the prophets and apostles to be ready for opposition and rejection. In the first reading, the high priest and the prophets kicked Prophet Amos out of the northern kingdom of Israel. They were afraid the King would become upset at Amos’ words.

In the Gospel, Jesus tells his apostles that there may be towns that won’t receive them. Therefore, they should shake the town’s dust off their sandals, a symbol inviting the inhospitable townsfolk to self-reflection. Then, they were to go to other towns, just as Jesus did in the scene preceding this Gospel story. Jesus’ family and neighbors protested his message in his hometown of Nazareth. Those were not the last protests Jesus would experience from certain people, especially the religious leaders.

Through baptism, we have committed ourselves to being like Jesus. Following Jesus, his word and his example is the key to becoming a prophet like him. Moreover, in the Eucharistic celebration, we eat Jesus’ body and drink his blood as a pledge to do, be, and live as he did.

### **What do we learn from Jesus about proclaiming the word?**

1-- Jesus determined the main topic of the proclamation to be **repentance**.

Repentance means returning to the Great Commandment of love of God and love of neighbor—all neighbors. To do that well, the messenger must be the message, too. We must, like Jesus, live a simple lifestyle—not preoccupied with clothing, money, or materials. We are not to promote ourselves nor to seek glory and honor. Instead, we must respect all other human beings, even our enemies.

2—We must proclaim **ONLY what God wants** us to say, even though it may offend those who wish to maintain the status quo and power. People knew Jesus did not play favorites. Nor did he speak to make people feel good and comfortable. When

Jesus ate with sinners—on purpose, the religious leaders grumbled. The leaders were angry when Jesus chased the cows, sheep, and doves, along with the money changers, out of the temple so that it would be a place of prayer. Eventually, the religious leaders were looking for a way to kill Jesus.

3—Just as Jesus was totally obedient to God’s will and word, so **we must be faithful to Jesus**. I say this because we can think we are being genuinely Christian by unconsciously manipulating Jesus and his message according to our plans and thoughts--personally, socially, religiously, and politically.

Remember the story of the people asking Jesus about paying taxes? He responded, “Pay back to God what is God’s.” In other words, do God’s will in everything. That usually means changing my personal, social, religious, and political ways.

We must avoid twisting Christ to justify our politics. What is called Christian nationalism, twists Christ into a general supporter of our politics without realizing we are misusing Jesus when we do such. I have seen images of Jesus carrying the American flag. I have seen a cross wholly painted with the stars and stripes in a Catholic home. Don’t get me wrong. Our flag is wonderful. But, we can’t use Jesus or his cross to support our politics in such a general way subtly. Politics has never been entirely free of polarization and misuse, especially these days.

Like Jesus, who proclaimed only God’s will, we, too, must proclaim the SAME KINGDOM OF GOD and the SAME VALUES he died for. We must be missionaries about the love of God, love of all neighbors, forgiveness, peace, justice, unity, respect for all human beings, respect for life, and promotion of service for all, especially the sick, poor, and marginalized.

We must be ready for God’s message to invite openness to change in our personal, social, political, and religious lives. Such a message does not necessarily feel good. In fact, at times, it may feel offensive—as did Jesus’ message and loving behavior- in his time and our time.

At an interfaith dialogue gathering several years ago, I suggested that we Christians pray for our Muslim sisters and brothers during their Ramadan period of fasting, praying, and almsgiving. It was a practice I experienced in another place. An elderly Catholic lady yelled at me, “You’re a heretic,” as she stomped out of the room.

In another setting, I suggested, as is my practice, to pray that Mr. Putin of Russia, Israel's prime minister, Mr. Netanyahu, the leaders of Hamas, and all national leaders hear God's Holy Spirit. Someone responded questioningly, "Really?" That person perhaps forgot that Jesus said, "Love your neighbor as yourself—love your enemies."

The Gospel says that when Jesus was rejected in his village, he was amazed at their lack of faith. Yet, Jesus didn't stop proclaiming the Kingdom of God. He went to other villages and continued teaching [Mark 6:6b]. We, too, must continue proclaiming God's word—calmly and friendly, not hassling family, neighbors, and friends, but bravely using opportunities for faith-filled conversations.