

HOMILY 15th SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME 2021
MISSION ON THE MOVE & NAIDOC ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Mk 6.7-13 Amos 7.12-15 Eph 1.3-10

In the context of discipleship today, we have readings which prompt thought along these lines. Amos the simple, reluctant 8th century BC prophet feels sent to challenge the status quo of a people who have grown slack and comfortable, in a time of peace and prosperity, but where they have also neglected the spirit of their faith in the God of the covenant and ignored his laws where it suited them. At the same time, the gap between rich and poor was increasing. Doesn't this sound familiar? For a start, however at least we have a social security safety net these days. In his preaching, Amos presents the themes of justice, God's omnipotence and divine judgement as critical to a genuine and sincere faith lived out.

(Unlike last week's theme of the prophet rejected in his own country, Amos is just an ordinary shepherd and sycamore tree tender, who comes from the southern kingdom to preach in the northern one, but they don't want to hear him disturb their equilibrium. It's the temple priest Amaziah, who is apparently happy to keep the people content in their comfort zones, presumably so long as the wealthy and self-righteous keep contributing to keep him in his place and observing the external rituals of Temple worship, but without follow through in action. It's an old story. Translated to today, those in power don't appreciate whistle-blowers exposing hypocrisy, corruption and bad practice in general, do they? It's always easier just to let things roll on as the status quo, particularly if we're doing alright.)

Having got back on the road again with his disciples, Matthew has Jesus moving to the next step, in terms of commissioning his followers to get their act together and into gear, as the itinerant mission goes ahead. This is surely reflective of life in the early church, where there was no time to waste in proclaiming God's Kingdom of justice, peace and love. The presumption, or at least, hope, seems to be that hospitality will be the order of the day for those who are open to the Good News and so welcome into their homes and lives, those who preach the message of Jesus.

At the same time, in the background, there is a sense that this is no picnic, and that a positive attitude of reception will not always be the experience of the missionary, and negativity to what is a message of faith and hope, will sometimes be the response. Isn't this the experience of life for all of us, at the different stages and ages we move through, adapting to change and challenges along the way?

It's also NAIDOC Week, so a word needs to be said on the ongoing issues of acknowledging our indigenous people, who have populated this land, and managed a harsh environment for well over 50,000 years, and continuing to address and try to right the wrongs of the past. Controversy continues over the details of their history, but there is no doubt that their culture, -spirituality, and customs were ignored and misunderstood by the European settlers who arrived here from 250 years ago. I've quoted Captain James Cook's statement in 1770, with his observation of their contentment and capacity to survive and thrive on the land, recorded on a plaque overlooking the Coral Sea in Cooktown, where the Endeavour had beached for reef repairs. Whatever about Cook's misguided views and other bad behaviour, with regard to aboriginal encounters, he did write this in his diaries:

“From what I have said of the Natives of New-Holland they may appear to some to be the most wretched people upon Earth, but in reality they are far more happier than we Europeans; being wholly unacquainted not only with the superfluous but the necessary Conveniences so much sought after in Europe, they are happy in not knowing the use of them. They live in a Tranquillity which is not disturb'd by the Inequality of Condition: The Earth and sea of their own accord furnishes them with all things necessary for life, they covet not Magnificent Houses, Household-stuff &c., they live in a warm and fine Climate and enjoy a very wholesome Air. . . . In short they seem'd to set no Value upon any thing we gave them, nor would they ever part with any thing of their own for any one article we could offer them; this in my opinion argues that they think themselves provided with all the necessaries of Life and that they have no superfluities.”

So how does this compare with the priorities set by Jesus in today's Gospel of Mission? It seems to well sum up the fact that, whilst physical beings with material needs of life's necessities, there is a spiritual and personal dimension that our indigenous people seem to have appreciated, perhaps more than we do, in living sustainably

in our environment and dealing with each other! Jesus' Gospel values endure, in working towards building the Kingdom of justice, peace and love for all, which we constantly hear from his words of teaching, preaching and action. We can learn much from our indigenous people too, as we address the sins of the past against them. There's no denying they were here first, well and truly!!

And, today we hear from Senior Australian of the Year, Miriam Rose, a most impressive indigenous woman and educator, whom I've had the privilege of meeting once, at her home in Daly River NT. She even took me out to meet a monstrous crocodile, thankfully on the other side of the river! Here are some wise words of enlightenment from her now.

john hannon

11th July 2021