

ctkAlive! Scripture Study
15th Sunday in Ordinary Time
2021—B Cycle



“Jesus Knocking at the Door”
(Notice that the door only opens from the inside.)
Artist unknown/undiscoverable

Opening Prayer

(edited and abridged for use here)

A Lay Catholic’s Prayer

Risen Lord,
help me to live out my vocation
as an active Catholic layperson.

Teach me how to fulfil my vocation
in the course of my daily activities,
responding to your every call,
no matter how subtle.

Inspire me to do whatever you initiate by grace.
Be my compass through life,
oriented always toward you,
for the glory of the Blessed Trinity.
Let this be my way to holiness.
Amen

Adapted from CatholicismFelt.com

Scripture Readings

Amos 7: 12-15 “The Lord took me from following the flock and said to me,
‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel.’”

Psalms 85: 9-14 “The Lord himself will give his benefits; our land shall yield
its increase.”

Ephesians 1: 3-14 “In love he destined is for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ.”

Mark 6: 7-13 “The Twelve drove out many demons, and they anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.”

A Reading from the Book of Amos (7: 12-15)

“Amaziah [*a priest of the golden calves at Bethel*] then said to Amos, ‘Off with you, seer, go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there by prophesying. But never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is a king’s Sanctuary and a national shrine.’

“Amos replied to Amaziah, ‘I am not a prophet or one of the fellow prophets. I am a breeder of sheep and a dresser of sycamore trees. But Yahweh took me from shepherding the flock and said to me: “Go, prophesy to my people Israel.”

“Now hear the word of Yahweh, you who say: No more prophecy against Israel, no more insults against the family of Isaac! This is what Yahweh says: Your wife shall be made a harlot in the city, your sons and daughters shall fall by the sword, your land shall be divided up and given to others, and you, yourself, shall die in a foreign land, for Israel shall be driven far from its land.”

Personal Reflection

Amos (8th c. BC/BCE) became the first Hebrew prophet to have a biblical book named for him (a bit of trivia). As a lay person and a shepherd/tree trimmer, he was not a prophet in the usual sense. Even so, God entrusted him with a mission to foretell the approaching destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel (without specifying Assyria as the future conqueror). Like other bona fide Old Testament prophets, Amos threatened the religious status quo. Yet, he always interceded for his people, doing his best to allay God’s anger.

Amos preached against Amaziah’s way of ministering as spiritual leader of Jerusalem. Because the Amos threatened Amaziah’s high-salaried position, the priest regarded his rival as a major problem. Amos lost his battle with the religious authorities. It isn’t known if Amaziah succeeded in expelling him from the country or only forbade him to preach in the popular shrines.

“Yahweh took me from shepherding the flock and said to me: ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel.’”

— *What is my own personal calling or vocation from God?*

— *When did God ask me to do something I didn’t want to do? What was it? How did I respond? And how did it turn out?*

— *When did I change “careers” [think broadly]? What brought that about? How did it turn out? Any regrets?*

Responsorial Psalm 85 (9-14)

The coming age of peace and justice

*Lord, let us see your kindness
and grant us your salvation.*

Would that I hear God's proclamation,
that he promises peace to his people—
lest they come back to their folly.
*Lord, let us see your kindness
and grant us your salvation.*

Yet, his salvation is near to those who fear him,
and his glory will dwell in our land.
Love and faithfulness have met;
righteousness and peace have embraced.
*Lord, let us see your kindness
and grant us your salvation.*

Faithfulness will reach up from the earth
while justice bends down from heaven.
Yahweh will give what is good,
and our land will yield its fruit.
*Lord, let us see your kindness
and grant us your salvation.*

Justice will go before him,
and peace will follow along his path.
*Lord, let us see your kindness
and grant us your salvation.*

Personal Reflection

Written after the Israelites returned from captivity in Babylon (538 BC/BCE), Psalm 85 adopted the most precious words in the human vocabulary: liberty, life, joy, salvation, love, justice, peace, and happiness. The return of the exiled Jews, however, was only one step toward authentic liberation. Nothing ever proved definitive. Each phase of the realization of God's plan led to . . . yet another phase. God forever challenged his people to go forward.

Even the actual reign of the Risen Christ and the work of salvation accomplished by the Church, are only *images* of the eternal kingdom's reality. When we feel troubled and discouraged by what is ugly around us, let us come back to this hopeful psalm.

— *When did I find myself held captive by something (addiction / a failed career choice / an unhealthy relationship / other)? If I got out of my "captivity," how did that come about? What role did God play in the process?*

“Faithfulness will reach up from the earth while justice bends down from heaven.” Our relationship with God is a two-way partnership. If we do our part, we will meet God half-way.

— *I count on God to reach out to me, but how good am I at reaching out to God? What could I be doing differently to bring myself to a place of greater peace with God . . . and within my soul? How willing am I to act upon my spiritual insights?*

A Reading from St. Paul’s Second Letter to the Ephesians (1: 3-14)

“Blessed be God, the Father of Christ Jesus our Lord, who, in Christ, has blessed us from heaven with every spiritual blessing. God chose us, in Christ, before the creation of the world, to be holy and without sin in his presence. From eternity he destined us, in love, to be his adopted sons and daughters, through Christ Jesus, thus fulfilling his free and generous will.

“This goal suited him: that his loving-kindness, which he granted us might finally receive all glory and praise. For, in Christ, we obtain freedom, sealed by his blood, and have the forgiveness of sins. In this appears the greatness of his grace, which he lavished on us. In all wisdom and understanding, God has made known to us his mysterious design, in accordance with his loving-kindness, in Christ.

“In him, and under him, when the fullness of time had come, God wanted to unite everything in heaven and on earth. By a decree of him, who disposes all things, according to his own plan and decision, we, the Jews, have been chosen and called, and we were awaiting the Messiah, for the praise of his glory. You, on hearing the word of truth, the gospel that saves you, have believed in him. And, as promised, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit, the first pledge of what we shall receive, on the way to our deliverance, as a people of God, for the praise of his glory.”

Personal Reflection

This first page of the letter to the Ephesians offers the most comprehensive expression of the Christian mystery in all of Scripture. This letter, like the Gospel of John, speaks of a re-creation of the world. By contrast, Paul’s letter to the Romans used more juridical terms: debt . . . reparation for sin. This passage balances Paul’s words to the Romans, which appear to emphasize God’s work within the tragedy of sinful humanity.

Paul implies that a simple *desire* to be “saved” cannot serve as the bedrock of our faith. It would be just as self-centered to practice our faith in order to enjoy, for example, good health. The Son has revealed to us the Glory of the Father. In doing so, he wished to draw us out of our religious egoism. In Christ we obtain freedom, sealed by his blood (v. 7). However, this does not mean that Christ shed his blood to make amends to a Father offended by sin, as if God were, like us, easily offended.

“God chose us, in Christ, before the creation of the world.” So, God knew me (as an individual person) before creation of the universe began? Wow!

— *How do I feel about that? How might that awareness change my perspective as I move forward living out the rest of my life?*

“You were sealed with the Holy Spirit, the *first pledge* of what we shall receive, on the way to our deliverance, as a people of God, for the praise of his glory.”

— *If my Baptism and Confirmation (plus the other sacraments) are only down payments on future benefits, what might await me in the future here . . . and in Afterlife?*

Proclamation from the Gospel according to Mark (6: 7-13)

“Jesus then went around the villages, teaching. He called the Twelve to him, and began to send them out two by two, giving them authority over evil spirits. And he ordered them to take nothing for the journey, except a staff: no food, no bag, no money in their belts. They were to wear sandals and were not to take an extra tunic. And he added, ‘In whatever house you are welcomed, stay there until you leave the place. If any place doesn’t receive you, and the people refuse to listen to you, leave after shaking the dust off your feet. It will be a testimony against them.’

“So they set out to proclaim that this was the time to repent. They drove out many demons and healed many sick people by anointing them.”

Personal Reflection

Prior to this gospel event, the apostles had merely accompanied Jesus, learning from him. Now, Jesus instructed them to proclaim their faith in him publicly. In doing so, he commissioned them to share in his mission to teach, even to heal the sick, as he had modeled for them. But first, the disciples needed to believe what they themselves went out to proclaim. Going two by two into the towns, they proclaimed what they had discovered. (Remember that Judas Iscariot was among them.)

People of that time used anointing with oil as a medicinal remedy. Jesus gave anointing a new meaning. Those anointed by the apostles received spiritual healing and deeper reconciliation with God.

“He began to send them out. . . .”

— *What is my unique vocation / calling as a disciple of Christ? In other words, what is my unique calling in life? What has Jesus sent me out to do (not necessarily to succeed at) during my lifetime on this planet?*

— *How open am I to entertaining a new or expanded calling / vocation in the future? How hard or easy is it for me to say, “Lord, do with me what you will?”*

— *How good am I at empowering others to find and fulfill their unique calling in life?*

For Inspirational Viewing/Listening

Video:

[“Why Is Life So Full of Suffering?”—Bishop Barron](#)

Music:

[Save Us, O Lord \(St. Louis Jesuits\)](#)

The Week Ahead

Journaling Prompts

— *Based on this weekend's Scripture readings, what does the Risen Christ ask me to do TODAY regarding . . .*

(1) the quality of the love I bring to my personal relationships . . . and

(2) my life as an emissary of Christ, committed to bringing God's love to the people with whom I interact in person and on social media?

Who this week needs to hear from me some expression of love?

Who needs to receive from me a moment of laughter and personal concern?

Why do I hesitate?

Take some time to write about your experience and feelings about events occurring in your life today and what you see happening in the world.

Preview of Next Week's Scriptures

16th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Jeremiah 23: 1-6 "Woe to the shepherds who mislead and scatter the flock of my pasture, says the Lord."

Psalms 23: 1-6 "The Lord is my shepherd. . . ."

Ephesians 2: 3-18 "In Christ Jesus, you who were once far off have become near by the blood of Christ."

Mark 6: 30-34 "Jesus said to the disciples, 'Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.'"

Closing Prayer

(edited and abridged for use here)

A Prayer for Myself

I beg you, Lord Jesus,
come into my life and offer your grace.

I'm open and ready to receive it.

Allow my heart to focus on you.

Make it my desire each day to live for you.

I know from the Scriptures

that you bestow your grace on me, no matter what.

So, I ask for that grace today.

Though not perfect, I strive to be better.

Help me see the clear but narrow path ahead,
so I can walk in your ways and in your glory.

I pray this in your name.

Amen

Adapted from [Learn Religions](#)

Questions?

Send any questions or comments you might have to algarrotto@comcast.net

Gender usage in writing: We are conscious of gender references to God in the Scripture texts. Often, attempts to rewrite these passages result in awkward sentence structures. We have left the biblical translations as they are but do our best to be inclusive in all other parts of the reflection.

The Sunday readings are from [Christian Community Bible: Catholic Pastoral Edition](#)

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(follow this link to my spiritual novel, [Bishop Myriel: In His Own Words](#))