

In the name of the most high Trinity and holy Unity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Y'all, those are some tough readings this morning from Amos and Luke. But, as a Franciscan, I am reminded that St. Francis's driving ideal in life and ministry was to just live and preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ as Jesus said it. Thus, I think it behooves us to especially listen to what God is saying through the scriptures that might be difficult for us to hear. So, I do want to look at these readings this morning.

But, I actually want to start with the Collect for today, because this prayer provides a good framework for these scripture readings. Our Collect for today is one of my favorites. It is an ancient, beautiful prayer, dating back about 1,500 years.

8:00 As the Rite II translation says:

10:30 This prayer reads:

“Grant us, Lord, not to be anxious about earthly things, but to love things heavenly; and even now, while we are placed among things that are passing away, to hold fast to those that shall endure”.¹

It is a great Collect. It is brilliant in its structural parallelism, yet realistically poignant in its message. The petitions in this prayer set up a simple dichotomy about our life in Christ and how we interact with the world around us. We ask that we “Not [...] be anxious about earthly things [...] while we are placed among things that are passing away”.

At first, this may seem like some unrealistic sentiment that we should not be anxious about anything on earth. But, the author of this prayer knew about true earthly anxieties. This Collect was written in the midst of the barbarian invasions of the Western Roman Empire.²

The original faith community that prayed this prayer lived in the midst of great, even violent, societal change and flux. And yet their example for us is to pray to God, and ask that we not fixate or worry ourselves with the present crises of the world, and instead, to focus ourselves on God alone. That doesn't mean what is going on in the world is inconsequential or worthless. Life is complex. It can be beautiful. But, life in this world is not ultimate or everlasting.

The reality is that the material world and universe that we know is passing away. Even seemingly permanent social institutions are not going to be around forever. Last time I checked, we don't live under the rule of the Roman Emperor. Nor do we speak Latin in our daily conversations, or wear togas to work. Everything in our temporary world is, by definition, finite.

¹ BCP, p. 234

² Marion Hatchett, *Commentary on the American Prayer Book*, p. 192

This world and, in fact, all of creation passes away at some point or another. Things change. Life marches on. Non-eternal things will pass away. It's a harsh reality, especially for the fleeting things we enjoy. And there's nothing wrong with enjoying and liking earthly things, if they stay secondary. There's nothing wrong with these temporary things, if we keep our true focus to "love things heavenly", and "hold fast to those [things] that shall endure".

Today's Collect provides a great lens to look at what our readings are telling us as well.

In our Old Testament reading from the Prophet Amos, Amos calls out the people for caring more about their bottom line at the expense of the poor. About enriching themselves at the expense of the most vulnerable.

Amos tells the people of Israel: "You might worship God in the traditional rites and prayers. But, while 'praising' God, you just want to get back to your predatory commerce, to take advantage of the needy disguised as business as usual. You don't really want to be in prayer. You don't really want to be at services. You're just there to keep up appearances. But, you want to get back to business. You want to deceive the needy, and rig trade to hurt the poor."

The people Amos is speaking out against might look like they "love things heavenly". They're at the religious ceremonies of Sabbath and the New Moon. At the exterior they might look like they care about God and his people. In reality, they hold onto and hoard things that are passing away. They are centered on earthly things. And use them to hurt others. That makes for a spiritually dangerous combination.

Amos ends very succinctly, "The Lord has sworn by the pride of Jacob: Surely I will never forget any of their deeds." God will remember what his people really care about.

This brings the question to us: Do we use our money and our stuff to help others? Or, do we use and manipulate the vulnerable among us to get more stuff? Which actually leads nicely to our Gospel reading today.

At the end of our reading from Luke, Jesus says point blank, "No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth." This is one of Jesus's great mic drop moments. You cannot serve God and wealth. Boom. Mic drop. End of discussion.

Money and wealth can be an important tool. Luke says that Jesus had several wealthy benefactors (including Mary Magdalene) that bankrolled his ministry. Paul did too. Money and the stuff we buy with our money can do lots of good in the world. However, wielded improperly and used to the detriment of others, it leads to sin, and becomes an idol in and of itself. Jesus says, "You cannot serve God and wealth."

Money can be idolatrous. But, wealth is not the only thing passing away that can either be a tool or can become an idol. Among them: Entertainment, careers, politics, technology. Do we use these as tools for the glory of God, and the benefit of society? Or, do they become an end in themselves?

Jesus says, "No one can serve two masters." So, what is our goal? Who do we want to serve?

Things that are passing away, or, the Eternal God? That's our choice to make.

I often like to look to the great heroes of the faith as I grow in my own spiritual journey and my relationship with God. And I think in this instance the example of St. Thomas Aquinas is appropriate and apt. Aquinas is arguably the third most influential theologian of all time (only after St. Paul and St. Augustine of Hippo). Thomas Aquinas wrote extensive philosophical and theological treatises, reasoning out why God has to exist. He also wrote hymns, particularly about the Eucharist, some of which are in our Episcopal Hymnal 1982. Aquinas wrote volume after volume about God, volume after volume after volume. His best-known work is his *Summa Theologica*, which means the Summary of Theology. This summary alone when published is about five decently-sized volumes. Since the reformation, many, especially in Protestant circles, have downplayed his influence. Yet, he remains one of the most thorough and comprehensive theologians of all time.

After probing the depths of the divine as far as human intellect could go throughout his writings, Thomas had a vision. In that vision, Jesus appeared to him and said, "Thomas, you have written well of me. What do you want as your reward?" And Aquinas, gave the great answer (in Latin), "Domine, non nisi te." Nothing, but you, Lord. Nothing, but you, Lord. Some might disagree with his theology, but I think that answer is a great example for all of us. Nothing, but you, Lord.

What is our goal? Who will we serve?

Will we cling to things that are passing away, or hold fast to the Eternal God who created the universe. Are we here at church to keep up appearances? Or, are we here to worship the Living God that loves us unconditionally? Can we answer like St. Thomas Aquinas, that all we want is "Nothing, but you, Lord".

Jesus said, "No [one] can serve two masters; for they will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other."

What will we hold onto? Who will we serve?

“Grant us, Lord, not to be anxious about earthly things, but to love things heavenly; and even now, while we are placed among things that are passing away, to hold fast to those that shall endure”.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.