

## 15<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time “Ambassadors of Hope”

Fr. Frank Schuster

It is a great privilege and honor to be your new pastor here at Saint Vincent de Paul. The readings this weekend couldn't be better. The prophet Amos is sent to prophesy to the great kingdom of Bethel. Jesus sent his disciples out into the surrounding countryside to proclaim the Gospel. I have been sent here to Federal Way. I clearly got the better end of that deal. Both our first reading and Gospel reading speak to how that first meeting between a minister and his people can potentially be awkward. Our first reading says Amos was unceremoniously banished from Bethel and in our Gospel reading Jesus warns his disciples that they will sometimes be kicked out of town upon arrival. For the record, none of them got a “Welcome Fr. Frank” banner. I am so very humbled by your gracious welcome and I pray that God gives me the grace and wisdom to serve you as you all deserve as a People of God.

The “getting to know you” phase can be an exciting moment in the life of any parish. However, it can also be a time of anxiety and even grief too. You have been served so very well by Fr. Bill and Fr. Tom. Covid 19 this past year was a kick in the teeth for all of us as we strived to find that balance between staying connected in our relationships while doing our part to keep the virus at bay. The world has been turned upside down in so many different ways, in our families, in our country, world, and even in the Church at times. This has been a very difficult year across the board for all of us. And now, yet another challenge, a change in parish communities for me and a change in pastor for you.

On the other hand, if we were to pause and reflect on this moment of meeting each other for the first time, in a deep and profound way, as disciples we already know each other pretty well. Why do I say that? I say that because all of us have the experience of being born into this world in mystery. All of us at some point asked ourselves the question, who am I? Why do I exist? What is my purpose? As we grew up, we stumbled in the darkness trying to find answers to these questions by braille really. We discover the beauty of our existence and the gifts we have along the way. We also become very familiar with the brokenness inside of us, our flaws and our failings. Or, as Dante commented at the beginning of the Divine Comedy, midway along the journey of our life, we can find ourselves in a deep wood where there is no escape. In that sense, as we grow older, we also become acutely aware of our mortality and that we simply cannot save ourselves.

And then, it happens. A light shines in the darkness which illuminates our existence, giving us meaning. We discover that this light is a Person. His name is Jesus. This encounter with Jesus is transformative because he alone can make sense of us. He alone can save us. He alone can love us back into the person we are meant to be. He alone can lead us to everlasting life. And so, in that sense, we know each other because we are here today in common worship. That is what churches are for. Churches are sacred places where we encounter Jesus and we have a beautiful church here at St. Vincent de Paul.

It is in this place where we encounter Jesus in the Word that is broken open for us. It is in this place where we encounter Jesus in the Eucharist as the Lord who wants to be as close to us as food and drink. It is from this place, we can then encounter Jesus in each other as disciples who are sent, just like Amos in our first reading and the disciples in our Gospel reading. We are sent into the world as ambassadors of hope.

My friends, because of our encounter with Jesus, we are a people of hope. We know that our lives have meaning. We know that life does not end in death. This hope in the future is transformative. This hope in the future has an impact on how we view our world, our place in it and the decisions we make in life in a way that is fundamentally different than those who do not have this hope. We know each other in this basic and fundamental way.

We also know what we have to do. We have to spend more time with the Lord in prayer and take account of all the ways we need his healing touch in our relationships, in our community, in our world and in the heart of that person we see in the mirror each day. What is it right now inside my heart that needs to encounter Jesus and to receive his healing touch? Think about it, where do I need Jesus the most right now? On the other hand, do I really dare? Do I dare let him in? A miracle might happen for me if I do which I can then share with the people around me and in my parish community.

Speaking of which, this weekend is also very special because we are beginning the process of reopening our parish more fully. As we reopen our parish more fully, we do so as a people of hope. We will not let the trauma of Covid 19 define us. We will not let the hurts we experienced this past year defeat us. We will not let the brokenness of our world sway us. As we reopen St. Vincent de Paul more fully, we do so as a people who have encountered Jesus, a people saved in hope.