

Week 26 – Ordinary Time - 092610

After you get on board a commercial airplane, the crew is required to give a demonstration of the emergency procedures. They ask you to pull out the safety card in front of you and pay full attention, but very few people do. Some crews try humor to make people listen. Others give up on getting your attention; they go through the motions and words as rapidly as possible in order to get on with the flight, and many people appreciate this. But the crew's message is literally a matter of life or death. Yet they give it so often and travelers hear it so often, that we become complacent to the potential serious risks of flying.

This week I spoke to the priests and deacons of Wyoming about the upcoming changes to the words of the mass; when I finished, Bishop Paul Etienne also addressed the group. He told the priests how careful we have to be about becoming complacent in the way we celebrate the mass. Sometimes we fall into repetitious patterns, and we do not often express well in word and action the meaning of the celebration we lead. He's right. It's also easy for priests to get complacent over rituals such as baptisms, weddings and funerals – events that are extremely important in the lives of families, but that can become just another event in a busy weekend for us. When we priests fall into a routine, it inhibits our sense of service and robs us from seeing the importance of what we do.

The dangers of complacency have been with us for generations, so Amos the Prophet, in today's first reading, stands in a long line of people expressing outrage with folks who don't care enough for their brothers and sisters. He's taking on the wealthy in this passage. They sleep on beds carved from ivory. They eat lambs and calves, tender food they have in such abundance that it doesn't matter if the youngest livestock is slaughtered. They play music, they drink wine, and they anoint themselves with oil. Amos depicts people who have it all and are indifferent to the needs of others. He predicts that their happy days are coming to a quick end. And they were. When Israel was led into exile, it wasn't just the poor who lost their homeland – the rich did as well. Amos implies that if the rich had been more concerned about the needs of the poor, God would have had more concern about the needs of them all.

We all face the temptations of complacency. Schoolmates take their friends for granted. Kids pay insufficient attention to the sacrifices their parents make. Parents overlook the achievements of children. Parties go late and loud without consideration of neighbors. Employers take advantage of employees. We get used to things being the way they are, and we do not always realize how special another person is, how unique their needs are, and how specific our love can be. God gives us plenty of opportunity to get up off the couch, and to do something for someone whose needs are overlooked. Amos would probably warn us that if we don't, worse things may happen to us. Many couples, for example, have seen the dire consequences that come from taking their partners for granted. If we give people the focus

they deserve, we will experience the joy that comes from seeing inside another person the way God sees them – precious, individual, and worthy of attention.