The Prophet Amos was given an unenviable mission. A herdsman from a backwater in Judah, he was sent by God to the Northern Kingdom of Israel to proclaim a message of judgment. The Northern Kingdom was not what we might consider to be prime mission territory. Its powerful ruler Jeroboam II had secured a period of peace and plenty. Samaria, the capital, was a byword for luxury and sophistication. Religiously the kingdom also seemed to be thriving. The sacrificial worship of the Israelites was conducted with pomp and circumstance, and the prosperity was interpreted as divine favour.

However, behind this veneer of comfort and religiosity, the reality was not so pleasing in the eyes of God. Thriving commerce had brought the Israelites into contact with pagans, and the true religion was being contaminated by worship of heathen idols. And while the economy boomed, corruption and injustice were rife.

Needless to say, the arrival of a cowherd, from the wilds of the south was not well received. Amos was eventually driven out of the kingdom by the chief priest at the great sanctuary in Bethel. Within forty years the mighty Northern kingdom had been destroyed and its population was deported by the Assyrians in 720 B.C.

In purely human terms the mission of Amos looks like a flop. But the important thing is that Amos was obedient to God’s command, and so he fulfilled his mission. We can be confident that Amos enjoys his reward in heaven, even if we cannot be so sanguine about the destination of those who rejected his prophecy. Amos was a faithful servant of the word of God, even if that word fell on deaf ears.

When we talk about the word of God in the Old Testament, we are talking about the words of Holy Scripture, and the words that were pronounced on the lips of the prophets under the inspiration of the Holy spirit. In the New Testament the Word of God Himself comes to us as a Person. This is the Eternal Logos, God the Son—the Word of God with a capital W. And again, like the prophets in the Old Testament, the Word of God Who is God receives a very mixed reception. Two thousand years after the Resurrection, we find a large-scale rejection of the word of God. The word transmitted in Holy Scripture is disdained by those who make the laws which govern our society. And the Word of God Who is God is largely ignored by those whom He came to save.

Nevertheless, it remains our task as Christians to proclaim the word of God. In this challenging climate bishops and priests have to do what they can to make the word of God as accessible and attractive as possible. And it is up to all of us to give credibility to our belief, by living in charity and especially in the care we
show towards those in need. At the same time, the Gospel can only be effective when proclaimed in its integrity, and this includes the hard bits as well as the passages from scripture which no one minds hearing. Some will embrace the Gospel in its completeness while others—perhaps even the vast majority—will reject it. Many reject it today because they are frightened of sounding a discordant note when everyone else is singing obediently from the same libretto.

Of course, everyone is glad to hear about mercy and love. And the New Testament is the greatest love story ever told. But Our Lord also sends His Apostles to preach a Gospel of repentance [Mk 6.12]. In order to taste the sweetness of God’s mercy and to participate in the Divine Love which is the essence of the Life of the Blessed Trinity we first need to confess our sins and receive forgiveness. This message of repentance will lodge in the throat of a society which, if it deigns to acknowledge the reality of God at all, only allows Him to exist in so far as He affirms us.

It can be tempting to reinterpret the word of God beyond recognition in the futile hope of adapting the message to modern prejudices, but then the Gospel is sapped of vitality. Such theologizing and prevaricating also constitute a calamitous contravention of Our Lord’s instruction to His Apostles when He sends them out to preach repentance. “If any place will not receive you and if they refuse to hear you,” He tells them, “shake the dust that is on your feet for a testimony against them.”

One of the glories of the Oratory Church is the series of statues of the Twelve Apostles, by the baroque sculptor Giuseppe Mazzuoli, originally created for the nave of Siena Cathedral. Looking at those statues we should consider that all but one of the Twelve were put to death for preaching the Gospel of repentance. Some of them carry the instruments of their martyrdom. St Andrew stands in front of his cross. St Bartholomew carries the blade with which he was flayed. And yet they were not a failure. Yes, they enraged the religious and civil leaders of the day, and they paid the ultimate price. But their blood fertilized a mustard seed which flourished into a mighty tree, in the branches of which the birds of the air have come to make their nests for two millennia. We should ask the twelve Apostles, and the Prophet Amos, to intercede for us. Like them, may we have the courage to sing those discordant notes that need to be heard while the rest of the world sings so obediently from the same libretto.

The Provost

¶ This is an excerpt from an article published in THE ORATORY PARISH MAGAZINE (August 2015, Vol. 92, No. 1131) the parish paper of the Brompton (London) Oratory.

THE FEAST OF THE TRANSFIGURATION

Sunday, August 6, 2023
11:30 AM
Solemn Mass & Sermon
Preacher: Father Bradford

5:00 PM
Solemn Evensong and Benediction
Preacher: Father Nathaniel Sanders, Parochial Vicar in Saint Columbkille Church, Brighton

Motets and Evening Canticles under the direction of Dr Janet Hunt

a reception follows this service

Coffee & Conversation

There are coffee hours scheduled after Mass on Sundays, August 13th and 20th. There is a sign-up sheet for anyone interested in hosting a Sunday coffee hour on other dates.
Many thanks to organist Daniel Lamoureux who was with us for several Sundays in July while Dr Hunt was in England for choral music workshops. During the time when we do not have a regular cantor for Mass we are singing Hymn 249 as a gospel procession hymn.

Congratulations to Rachel and Marco Vargas on the birth of their daughter Stella on May 17th. She joins an older brother. The Vargas family lives in Everett.

Contra mundum is now twenty-six years old; the first issue was in August, 1998. Past editors are David Burt and Steve Cavanaugh. The current editor is Susan Russo.

Congratulations to John Covert who received a certificate in Catholic theology from the Institute for the New Evangelization on June 24th. The institute was created in 2011 by St John’s Seminary for the continuing education of non-seminarians.

A year’s-mind Mass will be offered on August 12th for Mary Alma Parker. She was the wife of Fr James Parker, the first married Episcopal priest to be ordained a Catholic priest (in 1982). For many years both the Parkers were very active in support of converting clergy. They spent their last years in Charleston, S.C.

In September we will honor St Gregory the Great on September 3rd with music for the occasion. Fr Armano will be our celebrant. And we will offer Solemn High Mass on Saint Michael’s Day, Friday, September 29th, at 7:30 PM.

During the summer, travelling parishioners have included Evelyn Theriault (Ireland), Jonathan and Corinna Bradford (Toronto and Mackinac Island), Dr Janet Hunt (England twice) and Brother Cavet (Europe). Whom have we missed?

In the Synoptic gospels SS Philip and Bartholomew are associated together. St John’s Gospel does the same with Philip and Nathaniel. So it is natural to identify Bartholomew and Nathaniel. Bartholomew is not even a proper name. It means “son of Ptolemy.” So St Bartholomew is probably St Nathaniel, son of Ptolemy. His Feast Day is August 24th.

Twice in the parables teaching about the kingdom of heaven, Our Lord Jesus said “many are called, but few are chosen.” When we remember that the very name of the Church in Latin is ecclesia, which means “called out” it should be clear to us that the members of the Church are a separate body from the company of the redeemed. Being in the church is not an automatic ticket to Heaven! That is a protestant idea of the 16th century: equating the Church with the community of the saints.

In today’s gospel Our Lord describes the Church, this place where God calls us to His rule, as a net in the sea, and which catches all sorts of things. If you go down to the fish pier you certainly see that they have caught all sorts of things.

You and I might wonder why the netting is so fine that it catches all sorts of undesirable things. But it does, and it is the job of the fishermen to sort out the good catch from the bad catch.

All of this is a reminder that the Church is made up of all sorts, and that your job and mine is to so live our lives, applying all the saving medicines and regimens of the Catholic religion, her sacraments and spiritual direction, that one day we will be safely landed at the feet of the Master, that we will be the prized catch of the great fisher of souls, Our Lord Jesus Christ.

This sermon was preached in St Theresa of Ávila Church on Thursday, August 1, 2002. The text was Matthew 13:47-53.
THE SOLEMNITY of the Assumption in body and soul of Mary into heaven at the heart of the summer season reminds us of what our true and ultimate dwelling place is: heaven. As the Letter to the Hebrews says: Here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come (Heb 13:14). In the mystery which we contemplate today we find clearly revealed the destiny of every human creature: the Victory over death, to live forever with God. Mary is the perfect woman in whom even now the divine plan is fulfilled, as a pledge of our resurrection. She is the first fruit of divine mercy since she was the first to share in the divine covenant sealed and fully realized in Christ who died and rose for us.

Blessed is she who believed in the fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord (Lk 1:45). These words well describe Mary, the Virgin of the Fiat, who with her total availability opened the doors to the Savior of the world. Great and heroic was the obedience of her faith; it was through this faith that Mary was perfectly united to Christ, in death and glory. Looking to her strengthens our faith in what we await, and at the same time, we understand better the meaning and value of our earthly pilgrimage.

O Mary, Mother of hope, strong with your help, we do not fear obstacles and difficulties; fatigue and sufferings do not discourage us, because you accompany us on the path of life, and from heaven you watch over all your children filling them with grace. To you we entrust the destiny of the peoples and the mission of the Church. ...

Dear brothers and sisters, however dark the shadows that sometimes gather on the horizon and however incomprehensible certain events may appear to be in human history, we must never lose trust and peace. Today’s feast invites us entrust ourselves to Mary assumed into heaven who, like a shining star from heaven, directs our daily journey on earth.

Saint John Paul II

Pope John Paul II (1920-2005) was the Holy Father from 1978 until 2005. He was canonized in 2014. This article is from the Pope’s Angelus address given at Castel Gandolfo on August 15, 2002.

THE ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY
Tuesday, August 15, 2023
7:30 pm
Solemn High Mass & Sermon
Preacher: Father Bradford
a reception will follow this service

A GOOD CHRISTIAN

LUKEWARM SOUL is not yet quite dead in the eyes of the Lord, because faith, hope, and charity, which are its spiritual life, are not entirely extinguished in it. But it is a faith without zeal, hope without firmness, love without ardor. Let me describe to you a zealous Christian, i.e., a Christian who really and ardently longs to save his soul, and then a person who leads a lukewarm life in the service of God. Then we will compare the two, and you will see, to which class you belong.

A good Christian is not satisfied simply to believe in the truths of our holy religion. He loves them, he ponders over them, he tries in every possible way to acquire a knowledge of them; he loves to hear the Word of God, and the more he hears it, the more he longs for it. He believes not only that God sees him in all his actions, and judges them all at the hour of death, but he trembles at the thought that he will have to render an account of his whole
life to God. He not only thinks of this, and trembles over it, but he strives earnestly to improve himself daily. He never ceases in his endeavors to find new ways in which to do penance.

How different from this is the Christian who lives a lukewarm life! He still believes in all the truths which the Church believes and teaches, but his faith is so weak that his heart has no part in it at all. He does not doubt that the good Lord sees him, and that he is ever in his holy presence. But while believing this, he does not amend, nor sin the less. He falls into sin as easily as if he did not believe in anything ...

The hope of a good Christian is firm; his trust in God is unshaken. He never loses sight of the next life. The remembrance of the sufferings of Jesus Christ is ever present to his mind, is always in his heart ...

He raises his thoughts to heaven, to arouse his love of God, and that he may be sensible of the happiness of those who prefer God above all things. He represents to himself how great the reward is of those who forsake all things to do the holy will of God. Then he longs for God alone, and desires him only.

Saint John Vianney

Jean-Marie Baptiste Vianney (1786-1859) was a French priest who is the patron of priests. Often referred to as the Curé d’Ars because he was parish priest at Ars. This excerpt is from Sermons for the Sundays and Feast Days of the Year, published by Newman Press in 1901. His Feast day is August 4th.

CARDINAL NEWMAN ON CONSCIENCE AND TRUTH

NEWMAN’S CONVERSION to Catholicism was not for him a matter of personal taste or of subjective, spiritual need. He expressed himself on this even in 1844, on the threshold, so to speak, of his conversion: “No one can have a more unfavorable view than I of the present state of Roman Catholics.” Newman was much more taken by the necessity to obey recognized truth than his own preferences, that is to say, even against his own sensitivity and bonds of friendship and ties due to similar backgrounds. It seems to me characteristic of Newman that he emphasized truth’s priority over goodness in the order of virtues. Or, to put it in a way which is more understandable for us, he emphasized truth’s priority over consensus, over the accommodation of groups.

I would say, when we are speaking of a man of conscience, we mean one who looks at things this way. A man of conscience is one who never acquires tolerance, well-being, success, public standing, and approval on the part of prevailing opinion, at the expense of truth. In this regard, Newman is related to Britain’s other great witness of conscience, Thomas More, for whom conscience was not at all an expression of subjective stubbornness or obstinate heroism. He numbered himself, in fact, among those faint-hearted martyrs who only after faltering and much questioning succeed in mustering up obedience to conscience, mustering up obedience to the truth which must stand higher than any human tribunal or any type of personal taste.

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger

This is an excerpt of an address the future Pope Benedict XVI gave at a conference of the National Catholic Bioethics Center, in February 1991. It is reprinted from the July/August (Vol. XX, No. 1) issue of The Catholic Response. Back issues of this excellent magazine, edited by our friend Father Peter Stravinskas, are available in the tract case.

POPE SIXTUS APPOINTED Lawrence as head of the seven deacons who managed Church property in Rome, with care for the relief of the poor. He was martyred in 258 AD at the time of the arrest and martyrdom of Pope Sixtus. Lawrence became one of the most popular saints. In England alone about 250 churches bear his name, as does our beautiful church in Chestnut Hill. His Feast Day is August 10th.
URGED to reflect upon myself, I entered under your guidance into the inmost depth of my soul. I was able to do so because you were my helper. On entering into my self I saw, as it were with the eye of the soul, what was beyond the eye of the soul, beyond my spirit: your immutable light. It was not the ordinary light perceptible to all flesh, nor was it merely something of greater magnitude but still essentially akin, shining more clearly and diffusing itself everywhere by its intensity. No, it was something entirely distinct, something altogether different from all these things; and it did not rest above my mind as oil on the surface of water, nor was it above me as heaven is above earth. This light was above me because it had made me; I was below it because I was created by it. He who has come to know the truth knows this light.

O eternal truth, true love and beloved eternity. You are my God. To you do I sigh day and night. When I first came to know you, you drew me to yourself so that I might see that there were things for me to see, but that I myself was not yet ready to see them. Meanwhile you overcame the weakness of my vision, sending forth most strongly the beams of your light, and I trembled at once with love and dread. I learned that I was in a region unlike yours and far distant from you, and I thought

I heard your voice from on high: “I am the food of grown men; grow then, and you will feed on me. Nor will you change me into yourself like bodily food, but you will be changed into me.”

I sought a way to gain the strength which I needed to enjoy you. But I did not find it until I embraced the mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who is above all, God blessed for ever. He was calling me and saying: I am the way of truth, I am the life. He was offering the food which I lacked the strength to take, the food he had mingled with our flesh. For the Word became flesh, that your wisdom, by which you created all things, might provide milk for us children.

Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved you! You were within me, but I was outside, and it was there that I searched for you. In my unloveliness I plunged into the lovely things which you created. You were with me, but I was not with you. Created things kept me from you; yet if they had not been in you they would not have been at all. You called, you shouted, and you broke through my deafness. You flashed, you shone, and you dispelled my blindness. You breathed your fragrance on me; I drew in breath and now I pant for you, I have tasted you, now I hunger and thirst for more. You touched me, and I burned for your peace.

Saint Augustine

¶ This passage is from The Confessions of Saint Augustine. He lived from 334-430 and is one of the Four Latin Doctors of the Church. His feast day is August 28th.

This artwork was the original design of Deacon Gerard Rooney (d. 2002). He was a well known illustrator in the Boston area. Gerry designed the portrait of Saint Athanasius which is on the back cover of Contra mundum.
THE CANAANITE WOMAN REPRESENTS THE CHURCH

The GREAT ARE those who have made progress or else are perfect in the love of God and are reformed in feeling. The little ones are imperfect souls, people living in the world, all those who have only a child’s knowledge of God and very little realization of him, they are carried in the bosom of the Church and nourished with the sacraments, as children are with milk. All such as these love God and give him thanks that in his everlasting mercy and goodness he has saved their souls. For the Church, who is their mother and dearly loves her spiritual children, prays for them all to her spouse, Jesus, and obtains the healing of their souls, through the virtue of his Passion, And she prays specially for those who cannot express their own needs in prayer.

Thus in the Gospel the Canaanite woman asked our Lord to heal her daughter who was possessed by a devil. He at first refused, because she was of another race. But she did not cease to beg until our Lord had granted her request and said to her: O woman, great is your faith; be it done to you according to your will (Mt 15:28). And her daughter was cured at that moment. This woman represents the Church who asks our Lord to help simple, ignorant souls who are laboring under the temptations of the world and who cannot speak to God with fervent devotion or in the burning love of contemplation. It seems at first that our Lord refuses to hear, because these souls are, as it were, strangers to him, but in the end, because of the great faith and the merits of the Church, he grants her all that she asks.

And so these simple souls, who believe firmly what the Church believes, putting themselves entirely in God’s hand and submitting humbly to the sacraments and the laws of the Church, are saved through the prayers of their spiritual mother.

Walter Hilton

Walter Hilton (c.1340-1396) became an Augustinian Canon Regular in c. 1386. This excerpt is from his most important work, The Scale of Perfection, widely considered a masterpiece of English mystical writing.

THE CONGREGATION OF SAINT ATHANASIUS

The Revd Richard Sterling Bradford, Chaplain
Saint Lawrence Church
774 Boylston Ave.
Chestnut Hill, Mass.
(Parking lot behind the church)
Sundays 11:30 AM
Fellowship and Coffee in the Undercroft after Mass
Rectory:
767 West Roxbury Pkwy.
Boston, MA 02132-2121
Tel/Fax: (617) 325-5232
congregationstathanasius.com

SATURDAY MASS
Celebrated each week at 8:00 AM at the Marian altar in St Theresa of Ávila Church, 2078 Centre St, West Roxbury. Enter the main church via the pavilion or the St Theresa Avenue side doors.

CONTRA MUNDUM
The name of our parish paper comes from the Latin phrase, “Athanasius contra mundum,” meaning “Athanasius against the world.” Our patron saint stood firmly for the fullness of the faith. Fr Bradford and the Congregation of Saint Athanasius have published this paper monthly since 1998. To receive it by mail, send your address to the editor, Susan Russo, at sjrusso@icloud.com or write to Fr Bradford at the rectory. All issues are on our website under Parish Paper.
St. Lawrence Church  
774 Boylston Street (Route 9)  
Chestnut Hill, MA 02467

Parking is in the church parking lot behind the Church. Use 30 Reservoir Road, Chestnut Hill 02467 for your GPS.

Directions by Car from the North or South:  
Route 128(95) to Route 9 east. At the signal for Reservoir Road, take the right; the Church parking lot is a short distance on the left.

Directions by Car from Boston:  
From Stuart/Kneeland St, turn left onto Park Plaza. Drive for 0.2 miles. Park Plaza becomes St James Avenue. Drive for 0.3 miles. Turn slight left onto ramp. Drive for 0.1 miles. Go straight on Route 9. Drive for 3.5 miles. Turn left onto Heath Street. Drive for 0.1 miles. Go straight on Reservoir Road. Drive for 0.1 miles. The parking lot is on your right.

Directions by Public Transportation:  
From Kenmore Square station, board Bus #60, which stops in front of the Church. Alternatively, the Church is a 15-minute walk from the Cleveland Circle station on the Green Line C branch.