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We don't often hear from the prophet Amos. His writings are not the longest and most extensive to be found in the Old Testament. In fact, biblical scholars know little about him as an historical figure. But Amos is part of what is called the 'prophetic tradition', prophets who pass very harsh judgment on those who oppress the poor, the needy, the marginalized, the orphan, the widow and those in distress. All the prophets come out fighting in favour of those who are most in need, considering them the most 'favoured' of God. The prophets come out fighting against injustice. We find evidence of this in the first line of today's reading, 'Listen to this you who trample the needy...' Have a good look at yourselves; examine your conscience. The prophets don't have time for those who engage in elaborate worship of God while ignoring the poor on their doorstep. The prophets were very good at calling God's people to account, calling them to lift their eyes and see the injustice around them. The prophets in the Old Testament demand that injustice be corrected.

This reading follows the theme from last Sunday's Mass, looking at how we stand before God. Moses was beside himself trying to deal with a people who, once set free from the slavery of Egypt, then became so desperate that they bowed down and worshipped the calf of metal they had created. They became slaves to idolatry. The danger of slavery is never far away. In today's Gospel, twice Jesus calls money a 'tainted thing'. We use money to live and survive, to provide for our families in a dignified way and we expect to receive a fair day's wage for a fair day's work. Nothing wrong with this; we call this a principle of justice. The parish doesn't run on thin air; we need funds to live and promote the work of the parish. In the Gospel, Jesus warns against the temptation of getting too attached. Jesus is warning his disciples against a different form of slavery and idolatry. Why? Because discipleship is about freedom, honesty, stewardship of what we have and acting with integrity.

Freedom from slavery is not just a virtue for Christians. We often see media reports about some of the richest people in the world multiplying their wealth from year to year. If they have achieved this honestly, good luck to them. But what is really inspiring is to hear a story about a wealthy person who, humbly and without fuss, makes a generous

contribution to the eradication of disease through medical research, or funds a school in Africa, or builds a medical clinic. These people are totally free with their wealth and not slaves to it. Rather than accumulating more wealth, they feel a desire to share their wealth with the less fortunate. They often feel a desire to 'put something back into the community'.

The words of Jesus in the Gospel are fairly direct – 'A servant cannot be the slave of two masters'. Clearly, Jesus is lifting the bar of discipleship. Who do you really love? Who do you really serve? Who do you really worship? By definition, a slave is not free. And this became the terrible fate of God's people in the Old Testament when they found themselves worshipping the metal calf. But Jesus wants his disciples to live, serve and love in freedom. He wants them to be good stewards of the riches of God's kingdom entrusted to them.