Rev. David Mercer
Homily: 7/12/15
15th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B: *A Good Word To Use*
Amos 7:12-15; Ephesians 1:3-14; Mark 6:7-13

Teenagers: there's a word we Catholics don't use enough in everyday life. It's a good word, and there's no law or copyright that should keep us from using it more often than we do. Toward the end of this reflection, I'll speak of the word and invite you (and all of us) to make greater use of it. But first, let's look back at what we accomplished during the Easter season.

Recall that, on several Sundays during the Easter season, we gather in the hall after each Mass to brainstorm the hopes and values of our parish, to list our memories on our parish timeline, and then to prioritized all that we wrote before boiling it down into vision and mission statements that we announce on Pentecost Sunday.

I then leave town for a scheduled three-and-a-half-week vacation. I have fun, go to museums, take walks, drink coffee (and a few margaritas), take a ferry to the island of Key West, and enjoy some escape-reading. And yet, I can't stop thinking about our renewed mission statement. It really does grab my attention, and I can't turn off my thinker about what we can do here at St. Thomas of Canterbury to live to our mission.

Our renewed vision statement is challenging enough. We look into the future – five years, ten years out – and want to say the following about ourselves:

We choose to follow Jesus Christ in joy, gratitude, and service.

Here again are the words of our mission statement:

> *We are a family of Catholic Christians where are all welcomed.*
> *Inspired by the Holy Spirit, we follow Jesus by making disciples,*
> *serving others, and changing the world.*

It captures so well the mission Jesus gives you and me that can help us grow into our vision of the future. While on vacation, I keep thinking: for you and me to live to that mission, we're going to need God's grace – and plenty of it, too. Again …

> *We are a family of Catholic Christians where are all welcomed.*
> *Inspired by the Holy Spirit, we follow Jesus by making disciples,*
> *serving others, and changing the world.*

That's a tall job order. Think about it: we are going to welcome everyone, make disciples, serve others, and (here's the kicker) we are going to change the world. For you and me to live to that mission, yes, we will need plenty of God's grace. And more than that, I keep thinking that Jesus had better show up, here at St. Thomas of Canterbury Parish.

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And yet, I want everyone here to know that Jesus already has shown up. Jesus is already on the job. Consider today's Gospel proclamation. Saint Mark isn't simply reminding us of something that took place 2,000 years ago.

Saint Mark tells us of Jesus sending out his closest disciples (called the Twelve) in pairs on their mission. They go out in pairs, because two are required to give a trustworthy witness.

This Gospel passage has been proclaimed to every generation since then, because Jesus sends every generation forth as missionaries to be his witnesses. Jesus calls you and me to tell others that Jesus died and rose, making it possible for us even today to have a relationship with God that is personal, deep, life-giving. It's a relationship that we call Holy Communion. Jesus calls you and me to be missionaries in the neighborhoods of St. Thomas of Canterbury Parish.

And now, to that one word I alluded to when I began my reflection. First, please forgive me for using a very sad, very tragic example. I debated with myself whether or not to speak of it, but the example of bearing witness has stayed with me in a very powerful way.

In February of this year, twenty-one Coptic Christians (Egyptian Christians) are marched onto a beach in Libya and beheaded (butchered) by terrorists. I dared not see the video put up on the Internet, but perhaps all of us saw the photo of the twenty-one men wearing orange jumpsuits and forced to kneel on the beach. What most people don't know is what they're saying as their last words: "Lord Jesus Christ." And others: "Jesus, help me." There, at the end, the word (the name) *Jesus* is on their lips and in their hearts.

Our English word *martyr* is from the Greek word meaning *witness*. There, in a terrible moment, they remain true to Jesus, bearing *witness* to their (our) Christian faith. As Pope Francis said: "Be they Catholics, Orthodox, Copts, or Lutherans, it does not matter. They are Christians, their blood is the same, their blood confesses [their faith in] Christ."

Jesus gives you and me a mission. Jesus calls you and me to be missionaries in our neighborhoods, here in St. Thomas of Canterbury Parish. We will soon be talking about how to live to our mission. For now, I ask you (I ask everyone): when you leave the Church after Mass, see yourselves as missionaries. I ask you to take the simple step of using more regularly the word (the name) *Jesus*.

Teenagers: we Catholics tend to be not very public about our faith in Jesus. However, you (and everyone here) can use the word *Jesus* without forcing religion on someone. Just use it in a simple everyday way. Be willing to use the name Jesus. There's no copyright on his name. You and I are free to use it.

I ask you to set the simple goal of using his name once a day. Each time you do so, it becomes easier to use it again: *Jesus* on your lips, and *Jesus* in your heart. To say the

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word *Jesus* is the first step to living your mission (our mission) *to make disciples, to serve others, and to change the world*.

We choose to follow Jesus … Jesus the Christ.

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