

Homily for Jan. 2, 2021 – Epiphany!

At least in English, the word Epiphany has come to mean a sudden insight or understanding into the basic makeup of everything. Life and the universe now make sense. An epiphany is a moment of clarity. Such a revelation is something that is held dear. It is an anchor point in life in the middle of all the changes and shifting opinions that come and go.

For a religious person, the word Epiphany has a more specific meaning that goes back thousands of years to its basic meaning. An Epiphany is a manifestation of the divine. It is in this sense that we have used the word Epiphany for the events surrounding Christ's Birth. God-Made-Man is now visible to the world; He is now seen in the flesh.

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I want epiphanies. I have a desire for vision and meaning. When I hear of so many people getting them, I want them also. Even to read in the bible about those who are given miracles, seen healings, and spoke one-on-one to Jesus – why them and not me?

Of course, that kind of question ignores the experience of all those in the Old and New Testament. God making His presence known and giving His wisdom did not make life easier for many of them. In this fallen world it was often another layer of relationships and obligations to juggle. Jesus walked the earth and not everyone was convinced.

Still, Our Lord was indeed made manifest. And He did it in a way that we now recognize was His normal method. He came to us as one of us. He who is power and glory came as an infant, and a child. The angels came to the Shepherds, but it was the star charts that caught the attention of the academics. And then it was their presence that moved Herod to have the chief priests and scribes recall what the Scriptures said. And again, these foreign Magi received not angelic appearances, but messages only in dreams. Luckily, they were wise enough to know when the dream was worth paying attention to.

I am in the same situation. God, Christ, makes Himself present to me. But normally He does so in the normal ways of life and prayer and worship. In this

way He burns away my desire for spectacle. I follow Him because He alone is worth following.

Through everyone and everything around me, guided by Scripture, I travel where He wants me to go.

My anchor points are deep, but they are not fireworks. And they do not need to be.

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As a powerful man, Herod the Great deserved his name. He was given the title King by the Romans, and had impressive works constructed during his rule. But, morally, Herod was a ruthless man with anyone he saw as a threat to his power. He even put to death many of his family. Herod was not a man to try to imitate.

If we read in Matthew beyond today's passage, we see that Herod ordered the massacre of all the boys two years old and under in Bethlehem and its area. He did this in order to put to death this infant who might someday be a threat to his kingship. The Feast of the Holy Innocents observes this event, and is remembered on December 28 [Twenty-Eight]. It was this slaughter which Joseph is warned by an angel in a dream. It is from this danger that Joseph takes the Holy Family into Egypt to hide for a while.

From the beginning of his birth, and even as a child, Our Lord is presented as a danger to all this world holds as most important.

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When I was a teenager, a teacher once suggested that if there was ever real proof of an alien from outer space visiting our world, it would challenge all our basic assumptions that are the foundation of power and control in governments and economies all over the world. We would have to reset our priorities.

This teacher was a priest. Don't get me wrong - he was not a heretic. Rather, he left it up to us to make the connection between what he was saying and what is revealed to us in Christ. His speculation was not based on an overly optimistic desire for other life forms to exist. His thoughts were based on the reality that in Christ, we have truly met one who is beyond us. God has come. And anytime we let that affect the way we live – we are changed, and we change the world.

And the world does not always like this. God making Himself known in the world challenges the world's priorities. But the world needs to know that life and existence have meaning and purpose. And that meaning and purpose is not whatever we make up. Our purpose is not about power over others before they get power over us. That is the way of Herod. Our purpose is from He who is Love itself.

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Back to Herod. On the Feast of the Holy Innocents, the Office of Readings provides us with this quote which I will end on today. It is from a sermon by St. Quodvultdeus, bishop (who died around the year 450 [Four Hundred Fifty]).

“Why are you afraid, Herod, when you hear of the birth of a king? He does not come to drive you out, but to conquer the devil. But because you do not understand this you are disturbed and in a rage, and to destroy one child whom you seek, you show your cruelty in the death of so many children.”

“You imagine that if you accomplish your desire you can prolong your own life, though you are seeking to kill Life himself.”

“...your throne is threatened by the source of grace, so small, yet so great, who is lying in the manger.”

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My brothers and sisters: may we always seek Jesus, Him who has made His home in our souls. May we reveal Him to others, and not fear what He will do to us. May we be able to say, for this week yet to come, “Merry Christmas, Happy Epiphany, God is revealed and has been seen. Let us adore. Let us be changed.”

The words of St John, the Word was made flesh, bear the same meaning, as we may see from a similar turn of phrase in St Paul: Christ was made a curse for our sake. Man’s body has acquired something great through its communion and union with the Word. From being mortal it has been made immortal; though it was a living body it has become a spiritual one; though it was made from the earth it has passed through the gates of heaven.

Even when the Word takes a body from Mary, the Trinity remains a Trinity, with neither increase nor decrease. It is for ever perfect. In the Trinity we acknowledge one Godhead, and thus one God, the Father of the Word, is proclaimed in the Church.

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