

EPIPHANY 4-Last

This week we close out the season of Epiphany and we begin the preparations for Lent. The colors change to purple, the lessons and messages will begin to turn to sin and penance, and we will once again recall the path that leads to Good Friday and the Lord's sacrifice for us. We have seen in the first part of this church year, the anticipation of His coming in the season of Advent, the joy of Christmas and now the unfolding of the revelation of who Christ is and His showing to us His glory.

Epiphany is about that showing, that manifestation, and that beholding of glory; and it is also about the effects of that beholding: so that "we all, with open face beholding as in a glass" (or mirror) "the glory of the Lord, are changed from glory into the same image from glory to glory, even by the Spirit of the Lord."

All the scripture lessons appointed for the season provide a logical explication, a continuing meditation on that theme: beholding the glory, and being changed thereby. The general pattern is this: the Gospel shows some facet of the manifestation of divine glory in Christ: divine wisdom, divine power, divine love; while each corresponding Epistle lesson shows a corresponding manifestation in our life as Christians.

Thus, on the First Sunday after Epiphany, our Gospel lesson was the story of Jesus, the child, manifesting the wisdom of God in the midst of the Temple in Jerusalem. The corresponding Epistle lesson (from Romans 12) urged upon us the manifestation of that wisdom in our own life in the Church: "Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind." That is to say, the divine wisdom, manifest in Christ, is to be manifest also in us, as the new basis of our life, not only as individuals, but as members of one another in the body of Christ, "according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith."

In the second Sunday we are reminded of the heralding of John the Baptist in his telling of the coming of the Christ and the beginning of our Lord's ministry in the act of Baptism by John in the River Jordan. In the Epistle we are reminded of the gifts given us through the power of the Holy Spirit and our own ministries as reflections of our Lord's work.

On the Third Sunday, we had the story of Jesus' first miracle at the wedding feast in Cana, in Galilee: "the beginning of signs", as St. John says. The miracles of Jesus are always signs, symbolic acts, and in this case, even the occasion is a sign: the wedding feast is a sign of the mystical union between Christ and the Church. Jesus changes water into wine, a sign of the transforming power of God's grace. In the corresponding Epistle Lesson, again from Romans 12, St. Paul speaks of a renewed life for individual and community, a new life in brotherly love, water changed to wine.

Now in this week's Gospel Lesson we have further signs: stories of healing miracles of Jesus-- the cleansing of a leper, and the healing of the centurions' palsied servant; signs of the power of the grace of God to cleanse us of the leprosy of pride, to heal us of the palsy of wrath and alienation-- all those infirmities of which our collect speaks. Once

again, the Epistle Lesson yet again from Romans 12, spells out the implications: "Be not wise in your own conceits"; "avenge not yourselves, but rather give place to wrath"; "Be not overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good."

These lessons constitute a cumulative argument, variations on a theme: the theme of manifestation and transformation. The wisdom of God, the mystery hidden from the foundation of the world is now manifest in Christ, and the wisdom is ours to behold, to believe, and to understand, and to make our own, by "the renewing of our mind". By faith beholding the glory, we are "changed into the same image" changed by adoration. Here and now the glory of God in Christ is manifest in word and sacrament, in wisdom and gracious power. It is by beholding, by the steady focusing of intellect and will, by the habit of adoration, that we are changed. That is the meaning of Epiphany, and that must be the basis of spiritual life in us.

Our relationship with our Lord comes from a real and interactive effort on our part through our efforts of prayer, meditation, reading of Holy Scripture and worship. As we come to know those who are close to us, so too we will come to know God through a deepening relationship through our faith and trust. I have often spoken of the journey we take through life and the fact that God walks with us every step of the way, even when we forget that He is there. When we turn in the depth of our anxiety and adversity and see His face, we know that no matter the trial, He will help us through it. This is the hope, along with the gift of eternal life, which He has promised us in Holy Scripture.

As we begin the countdown to Lent, let us reflect on the simple truth that He calls each of us by name and here reminds us, "My Child, I am here." Let us walk with confidence our journey in life knowing we do not walk alone. Let us also help those who take this journey with us, reflecting God's love and holding onto them, as He holds onto us.

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