

Homily
January 8, 2023
The Epiphany of the Lord
27:37-39:00

Manifest! No, not a Bill of Lading or the listing of cargo. No.

Manifest. That is, something “in hand,” held out to be revealed. Manus. Festus. That we might know something more than just the present reality.

We celebrate today, brothers and sisters, the Feast of the Epiphany. It’s a Greek word which means, “manifestation.” And for us it is Manifest God in Christ and through Christ.

Now, there are many on this day among Christians who remember God’s manifestations in Jesus Christ. For us in the West, it’s the Magi, the three astrologers, “Kings” if you will, who brought gifts as we heard in the Gospel. For others in the East, it might be from the Synoptics, the Baptism of the Lord, where he is revealed as **Beloved Son**. And still for others in the East, it’s (the Gospel of) John – the Wedding Feast at Cana. For us, we have also seen another earlier, on Christmas – the manifestation of God in Christ to the shepherds.

Now there is a commonality in each one of these moments of God’s message being received. There are three that tie together very well: the shepherds, the crowd assembled at the Jordan for the baptism, and the wedding guests. Each of these groups were Jews: stinky shepherds in the hills, a crowd who journeyed a long way to hear John the Baptizer and to enjoy his baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (and then a special encounter with the One, the Beloved Son), and of course the wedding guests who witnessed a terrible culinary faux pas. They ran out of wine. And Jesus, urged by his mother, reveals himself in the First Sign in John’s Gospel.

But there is one that is to the Gentiles, brothers and sisters – those who are non-Jews – the epiphany that we have heard in the Gospel. “Non-Jews” basically means the entire world. This revelation through the three kings is to all of us who are not Jews. This is what Paul proclaimed in the reading to the Ephesians today -- that wonderful moment when God’s plan not only touched his chosen people, but the entire world. It was to be for all humanity, not for just one select group.

You know, Christianity is unique among all the world religions because God becomes **incarnate**. God comes to live – to pitch his tent – in our midst. No other religion proclaims such a thing by God. And he shows this by moments of encounter as we have just listed.

Now, common to all of these epiphanies that we have heard is “Journey.” Think about it. The shepherds in the hills have to travel to Bethlehem. The crowds from all over Judea flock to the desert to the Jordan. It’s a long journey and a dusty one. All of those who came to the wedding feast may not have had to travel that far because they were from Cana. And yet still, they had to journey. And we know that the Magi journeyed far from the East to the West.

They were individuals, were they not? All of those who journeyed – they encountered God’s manifestation of himself in the world.

Have you had any epiphanies from the Lord in your life? I see some heads going like this (nodding). Others are looking at me like, “Don’t ask that question. I don’t want to answer that question because I can’t think of one.” Ah, but you have. We all have.

I’ve had two marvelous moments on retreat, both at Jesuit retreat centers. (I don’t know what that means. I think P.J. Kervan would be thrilled to hear that.) Both times in deep silence I felt the very presence of God. And I am very thankful for those moments: one early in priesthood and one when I was on sabbatical.

But those are not the only moments. Those were profound and very personal. I have seen it many times in my life. From you. Other moments. Other proclamations. Other people of faith revealing some aspect of God. They were the instrument. He was the message.

You’ve had those moments, haven’t you? You’ve come to know that God is with us. And each of us, just like those in the epiphanies in the Gospels – Journey.

We have a life journey, a faith journey, where yes, we live ordinary lives. But from moment to moment there is a manifestation of the power and the wonder of God in Jesus Christ. We should cherish those moments and periodically recall them, such as today.

But there is also the reality of the communal encounter of God made manifest. We do it every time we come here. Is not our Eucharistic liturgy a manifestation of God in Christ. Do we not embody that Christ. Do we not hear the Word of Christ and the word of his believers. Do we not encounter the very reality of God coming in our midst in Real Presence at this altar? And then set it in a safe place that we might always know that **God is in our midst?**

What shall we do with this, though? Well the shepherds surely didn’t hide and say, “Well that was nice.” No. They gave praise and thanks to God as they heard, “Glory to God in the highest!” And

they hurried to see what that meant. The Magi - yes, they journeyed. We don't know what happened afterwards. The baptismal crowd – we don't know what happened with them. And the wedding guests – we don't know what happened with them. But we do know this: they were touched and somehow that touching was remembered.

So brothers and sisters, consider your moments, your “Aha!” moments in God's Word. Your “Aha!” moments in the midst of the body of believers. Your “Aha!” moments here (pointing toward the altar). Or in nature. Or in a friend, a soul mate. Recall those many manifestations in prayer and in Sacrament.

What are you doing with them? Are you like the shepherds who would give praise and glory? Are you like Paul in his ministry, who devoted himself entirely – from the moment he encountered the Lord on the road to Damascus – his own epiphany. Or are you and I more like somewhere in between?

What are we doing with these moments? They are a gift profound. No less than the Magi.

We have been given a gift. How shall we respond to that gift and proclaim in our lives,

“God is with us.”