

A sermon preached by Father Dwight D. Duncan, ssc - Rector, St Matthias, Dallas, Texas

1/8/2006

Epiphany I – The Baptism of Our Lord

Year B

Friday last, Christmass Season ended and we entered the season of *Epiphany*. *Epiphany* is one of those beautiful Greek words which have entered our language almost unchanged. It means the manifestation of something, the revealing of something.

To illustrate: Let's say, out of love for my wife, on my day off, I make her a wonderful dinner. I set the table with our china, silver and crystal; set her down in the den when she arrives home from school; serve her a chilled martini, then dinner by candlelight, then...*whatever!* This entire action of mine is an *epiphany* of my love for her. Got the picture?

Well, on the feast of the Epiphany last Friday, we recalled an event which occurred early in our Lord's earthly life which reveals, *epiphanizes*, a wonderful fact for all people. The event is the coming of **non-Jewish** wise men to the Jewish child Jesus, whom they recognize and accept as Lord. Their non-Jewishness is important: it discloses that Jesus is Savior *for* all people and Lord *of* all people,. Born a Jew, Jesus is also for non-Jew; born a man, he is also for woman; born poor, he is also for rich; born whole and holy, he is also for the sinner, the disturbed, the deformed, the sick. That is very good news!

Today we gaze upon another event in Jesus' earthly life which *epiphanizes* great news for all. It is the baptism of Jesus, which, for him, was his moment of public identification with you and me in all aspects of our life. Notice the point at which Jesus identifies himself with us: it is the point of our greatest need and our greatest distance from his Father, our Sin. Remember, the baptism of John was for sinners, repentant sinners, those who longed to be back in fellowship with God. By undergoing this bath, they were declaring that they had sinned and were unworthy of God's mercy, but that they wanted to be restored to his fellowship and were ready for him to do with them whatever he must to make this possible.

And Jesus undergoes this penitential bath. Amazing! The only person who ever could have addressed us as "you sinners" instead says "we sinners", immersing himself completely in the full reality of our human condition .. its joys, its sorrows, and its mediocrity. Let us consider this morning some of the meaning for us of Jesus' full sharing in our human condition.

There *were* joys for Jesus through his immersion in our humanity. The wedding in Cana where he changed water into wine...the joking repartee with the Samaritan woman about crumbs from masters' tables...the constant conviviality with friends, a comradeship *so* constant and *so* convivial that it got Jesus accused of being a lover of too much wine and food. All these things hint at the smile of Jesus, the fun of Jesus, the deep joy for Jesus as he shared life with us.

There *were* also sorrows for Jesus through his immersion in our humanity. The desertion of companions because they could not take the strength of his words... the betrayal of Judas and the flight of the rest of his closest companions at the moment of his greatest need...all these things witness to us of the sorrow Jesus received by sharing in our life.

But then there is also the mediocrity of our life in which Jesus shared, all those things which we would just as soon do without, if we could. Jesus knew tiredness and hurt. He needed food and sleep. He had to go the bathroom. He had to go through puberty. He was subject to the same aches and pains, colds and fevers which visit us. And Jesus too had to go through the searching of personal growth, of discovering his identity and his vocation in life.

This is quite something, the way God immersed himself in our humanity, making himself subject to all its laws and conditions. But this fact means some wonderful things for you and for me, things which, as we bring them to mind, can help us in the living of our lives well, whatever their details may be.

For one thing, this fact of the way God has completely shared our human condition means that there is no depth nor height to which you and I can go where God is not. Should we enjoy happy fellowship with others, God is there with us. Should we sit, confused, in our room at a psychiatric hospital, God is there with us. He himself is living all these moments, of whatever type or quality, with us. We are never alone.

For another thing, Jesus' total immersion in our humanity tells us that it is in the particulars of our daily life that we either become or do not become saints, *real* human beings. This is important to know because of how much time and energy we waste trying to get out of these particulars and in to other ones. What do I mean?

Well, consider how much time you've spent in your life thinking that there is some particular place "out there," some particular one "out there," by which/with whom you will be able to be yourself and become who you really are. We want to escape from the ordinary, the familiar...especially when that ordinary and familiar is hard, unpleasant, painful.

Well, there indeed *IS* some particular place and some particular one by which and with whom we can be and become ourselves. But this particular place is not "out there," nor is the particular someone "out there." The place is "wherever I am right now" and the someone in it is Jesus.

People who are always going to other places and other people to "become themselves" never do. Why? Because while the places and the people change, THEY DON'T. Instead of trying to make the best of where they are and with whom they are, which is the response which "makes us", they are always seeking to escape to a situation and people who "fit" with them. Such situations, should any exist, just don't grow us up.

So, these folk don't change. They just keep repeating the same mistakes over and over again. Things will never change for us until we are willing to be where we are with Jesus, working with him where we are to become as he is.

You have a spouse who is a disappointment? You can learn the patience of Jesus toward you by practicing patience with them. You can learn the way Jesus challenges you to change, by practicing challenging them. You can learn the charity Jesus has toward you by practicing dealing lovingly

with them even if they are unlovely. You can learn the obedience of Jesus toward his Father by practicing being obedient to your vows to them. You can learn to die the death of Jesus which leads to resurrection, by practicing dying to yourself for them.

You have a friend who is a pill to put up with...children, parents, a boss, a priest, parishioners? So with each of these. Just as it was for Jesus immersed in our humanity, so it is with us: It is in our life *as God sends it to us or allows it to us* that the possibility of our holiness and true joy resides. You want heaven at last? To get there, you've got to learn how to live well with everyone else. That is what this earthly life is for.

And to help us with this, heaven comes to us...Jesus comes to us, present in every moment, yes – and always, most assuredly, present in the food which comes to us from that, his altar. He is with us where we are to help us BE where we are, so that we might finally be with him where he is, forever. Accept him where you are, with whom you are and put yourself out to be with/for/and like him there...and one day, you will contain heaven...and heaven will contain you.