

The Epiphany (B) 2018
(Isaiah 60:1-6 / Matthew 2:1-12)
06.01.2018

Today we celebrate the *Epiphany of the Lord*. The word *Epiphany* means *Manifestation*. As we sing in one of our liturgical responsories here at the monastery: Today *Christ has been made manifest*. This is what the whole of the Christmas season has been celebrating: **the manifestation of the Lord in our midst** through the incarnation of the Christ child, His being revealed to the shepherds on Christmas night and now today His presence having attracted the attention of the wise men of the East. One of the liturgical antiphons of this Solemnity reminds us that we are also led through today's feast to think of the adult Christ being made manifest as *God made man* in the mystery of His Baptism in the Jordan and at the outset of His public ministry at the changing of water into wine at Cana in Galilee where, we are told, *His glory was revealed*. This antiphon which is sung at Vespers today proclaims: *Three are the mysteries we celebrate this day: On this day by a star the wise men were led to the manger; on this day wine out of water was brought forth for the wedding feast; on this day in Jordan's waters by St John's hand Jesus chose to be baptised that He might save us. Alleluia.*

While we are called to contemplate all these mysteries on this day of grace, this is not all that is asked of us. **By our commemoration of the *Epiphany* we are called to do more than just mediate upon Christ in these mysteries; we are also called to imitate what Christ revealed in these mysteries by the way we live our lives.** Put simply, **we are all called to be an *Epiphany of the Lord*.** This implies that that we allow Christ's manifestation – His various manifestations – to be reflected in our lives. What I am saying amounts to this: we are called by the way in which we live our lives to bear witness to Christ having come into the world to reveal God's love to humanity. **We are called to reflect the love of God which is made manifest in Christ Jesus by our whole way of being.**

How can we do this?

Like the infant Jesus we are called to let God's humility shine through our poverty and vulnerability. We are called to dare to believe what the apostle Paul declared when he spoke of God's glory being revealed and managing to shine through our human weakness. St Ephrem who wrote abundantly on the mystery of the Epiphany has a few lines in one of his many hymns which he places on the lips of Mary – Jesus' mother. These lines draw to our attention how Mary felt graced by God in her poverty not only to have witnessed the mystery of the Lord's Epiphany but to have actually been introduced into it. St Ephrem has Mary declare: *Son of the Rich One, Who despised the womb of rich women, what drew You toward the poor? For Joseph is needy, and I am impoverished. Your merchants brought gold to a house of the poor.* Identified with her Son, Mary can sing as she looks at the magi: *Behold Your worshippers surround me too, and their offerings encircle me as well.* At this point in the hymn St Ephrem has Mary immediately turn her attention to her Son with the magi to adore Him and sing His praise with them: *Blessed be the Babe Who made His mother the lyre of His melodies.*

In our poverty, just like Mary, we are also called to sing the Lord's praise, recognising how the Lord has blessed us by associating us with Him in His mission.

Likewise, as happened when the Wise men from the East approached Jesus, and Mary and Joseph bade them welcome as they came to venerate the Christ child, so too **we are called to be receptive and welcoming in regard to all those who come our way from outside our own faith tradition.** By our encounters with those who come our way from beyond the

boundaries of Christianity – all men and women of good will who truly seek wisdom and truth, who truly seek God – we are called to present Christ and bear witness to Him as the One who has come into the world to bring salvation *to all*. Earlier in the Christmas days we heard Simeon speak of the child as not only *the light of God's People Israel*, but also as *a light of salvation for all nations*. God sent His Son into the world so that all would be saved. His hope is to find a universal welcome.

Like the adult Jesus who was baptised in the Jordan, daring to stand among sinners and mingle with them, unafraid to be identified with the marginalised – people who would have been frowned upon by the religious society of His day – so we are called to manifest God's love to all others by standing in solidarity with every person, without exception – daring to identify with those who are pushed to the margins of society today and held out there, apart, ostracised, alienated.

Pope Francis – a great missionary pope – is forever encouraging us to go the peripheries, to be near to those who are kept on the margins not only of society, but of the Church as well.

Finally, just as Jesus' presence at the marriage at Cana in Galilee was to become a great sign of the Lord's compassion and concern for a young couple in their need and for all who were gathered around them at their wedding feast – **just as the experience of Jesus' compassion was to be a transformative experience for all who were gathered for the feast at Cana – so we are called to contribute to bring about change into today's world and to begin with in today's Church.**

I believe we can imagine what Jesus did at Cana not only in terms of the actual happening – the transforming of the water into wine – but also in terms of the transformation that must have taken place in the lives of all those who partook of the new wine He gave them to drink. There is little doubt that as Church we need to be putting *new wine* into *fresh skins*. The stone water jars which were used for the ablution rituals of the Jews changed by Jesus into jars of wine announce a radical change in the religious culture of His day. **The miracle of Cana points to the radical change the Lord brings about in people's lives; it points to what we call *conversion*.**

We all need to be converted, changed. We all need to show that we have undergone a radical transformation by daring to identify more and more with those who are marginalised, all who are suffering, including those frowned upon and held at a distance by today's religious establishment – as well as the rejects of society. Again our great missionary pope gives a lead and offers us a striking example in these regards.

That the Epiphany should lead us from our contemplation of Jesus to a readiness to reflect His light to all around us is made clear by the writings of the prophet Isaiah. If the gospel speaks of the star leading to Jesus, the light shining down from the star shining upon where the child had been born, today's first reading from Isaiah reminds us that God's light must shine upon God's people in order to radiate in and through them so as to reach out from them to all around. The Lord's light should radiate from our lives! When we read Isaiah's message we see that as God's people Israel was called to let her light shine for the nations.

What was said for Israel in time past applies to the Church today. God's desire is to transform all of us and then to use us to bring His truth to others – remembering that to speak of the Lord's truth is another way of speaking of His love! In Christ Jesus *love and truth have come together*.

How important it is for us to share our life as living proof of the change God has wrought within us and can bring about in all those who allow Him to accomplish His saving work within them!

Just as we are told that *the magi went home by another road* after their encounter with Christ, so we should have undergone some change – I've already called that a conversion experience – by our celebration of the Christmas mysteries... by our participation in this Eucharist. This is, I believe, is the message we are asked to hear and take to heart here today.

May our lives be enlightened by Christ's own light this Epiphany so that, in our turn, we may be what the apostle calls us to become in his writings: *bright shining stars in today's darkened world.*

Yes, may each one of us be a star which leads and guides others to Christ... a light for others on their path of life. **In this way we will have fulfilled our mission to be an *Epiphany* in today's world.**

Amen