

Epiphany
(Isaiah 60:1-6 / Matthew 2:1-12)
06.01.2022

On this Epiphany Day we hear the prophet Isaiah tell God's People to let their light shine for the benefit of all the nations of the earth. The call to let our light shine, to reflect the light of Christ, for the benefit of the whole world, is addressed to us as Church today. It is a call that is relevant for every age and generation, and, not least, for us in the present time. In so many ways, the world in which we live longs desperately for a glimmer of light, a spark of hope. People are struggling a lot because darkness surrounds them and shadow shrouds them on so many fronts. It is part of our Christian vocation to share the light of Christ (His Gospel) with the world around us. It befalls each one of us to manifest before all our brothers and sisters in humanity that it is possible to live fulfilled human lives in Christ-Jesus, strengthened by the help of God's grace.

As I listened to the words Isaiah proclaimed to the People of Israel, I found myself thinking of something the Apostle Paul shared with the Christians of Ephesus. In his Letter to the Ephesians, Paul speaks of the mighty power of God's glory at work within us. He describes God's glory shining through Christian disciples as a power that is able to do far more than we would ever dare to ask or even dream of – infinitely beyond our highest prayers, desires, thoughts or hopes. The apostle's insight reminds us that as Church – a group of fallible people, a community of believers marked by the many personal and collective weaknesses we are only too well aware of – we can be, nonetheless, a powerful instrument in God's hands. Our Christian vocation would have each and every one of us do great things for God, relying on the help of the Lord's grace at work within us. For this to happen, for us to be used in this way, we must submit our lives to God in an attitude of silent surrender. We must place in the Lord's hands whatever it is that we have to offer Him by way of personal gifting. We must present our human resources to the Lord (however great or however small these may be), so that He may transform them by the action of His Spirit, to be used by Him for the good of those to whom He sends us to proclaim the powerful message of His Good News. Put simply, we must consent to our lives becoming channels of God's grace. That requires of us that we accept to be guided by the Lord's own dynamic and unlimited love. What really matters is not that we consider that we are capable of doing great things by our self, off our own bat, but that we dare to believe that with God everything is possible. Paul reminds us that the Lord is capable to doing far more in and through us than we could ever imagine... and this for the benefit of the world into which we are all sent to bear witness. It seems to me important for us to hear those words and bear this thought in mind on this day when we celebrate the mystery of the Epiphany (the Manifestation) of the Lord, which is, at one and the same time, a great contemplative and a great missionary feast. Celebrating the mystery of the Epiphany we should remember that we are called to manifest to others through our engagement in mission the One we have contemplated in His humble self-revelation in the Child of Bethlehem.

All that to say that, at the very heart of the feast we celebrate today, the call for us is to glorify the Lord by our lives. The call I hear addressed to each one of us is to manifest the God of glory in and through our own humble existence. We can do that simply by placing our gifts at the Lord's disposal – as the magi placed their gifts before the Child Jesus when they prostrated themselves before Him to do Him homage. The gifts we bring and present to the Lord are our talents and abilities. With these we are called to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace, to quote 1 Peter 4:10. Of course, before we can venture to do that, we must, first of all, have discovered and identified the particular spiritual charisms with which we have

been endowed... and for what purpose they have been confided to us. Paul lists some of the principle gifts given to God's servants in his Letter to the Corinthians, encouraging his readers to use them for the upbuilding of the Church. In the New Testament we find lists of some of the gifts God has bestowed upon His people – stressing that all these charisms be employed for the good of others. The apostle speaks of how some are gifted as administrators, others as apostles, and so forth. He talks of how there are people who possess the very valuable gift of discernment; yet others who are gifted for and willingly engaged in the ministry of evangelism and/or that of exhortation. The apostle speaks of how the Church is enriched by those who have great faith and by those who are generous givers; how the world is blessed by those who bring healing and reconciliation where these are needed. He goes on to talk of how others offer great help and provide encouragement by their charism of hospitality. Then there are certain persons whom he sees the Lord to have endowed with knowledge and insight; others who have recognised leadership skills. All of these various gifts are a real asset for the good of the Church and for the well-being of the world into which the Church is sent to bear witness to God's grace. Paul rejoices that there are those who are ministers of God's mercy; others who are prophetic figures raised up by the Lord to speak His word of life where and when its message is most needed. The Apostle speaks of how the Church is blessed by those who have true servant hearts; by intercessors who uphold their brothers and sisters with their fervent prayer; others still who serve God's People as teachers or shepherds of the flock. Then there are those men and women who have the gift of wisdom and spiritual understanding. The great variety of gifts I have just mentioned are all to be recognised and rejoiced in as having come from God, to be used in the power of His Spirit, for the purpose of the upbuilding of the Church, in view to its mission ad gentes, to the world.

I see the many and varied charisms with which we have been endowed as gifts to be offered to the Lord in the way the magi offered their gifts to manifest something of Christ's identity to others. The Prayer over the Gifts that will be used in this Eucharist will have us ask that the gifts of the Church (that is, our gifts) which we bring before the Lord, which are not now gold or frankincense or myrrh be accepted to represent the very One who is the Giver of every good gift. That prayer of the Church speaks of our gifts – whatever they may be – as amounting to a proclamation of Christ Himself.

At this time when the Church has been called upon to engage in the Synodal process (in which all of us are invited to journey together, listening to each other, sharing with one another) I hear a pressing invitation addressed to us to pool our various gifts, so as to be better equipped to share the core of the Gospel message, the person of Jesus Christ. Bearing witness to the faith that is within us, we are called to share Christ with those who do not yet know Him.

God who wants to reveal Himself to the world has chosen to manifest His Christ using poor and fragile human means. He has chosen to make Himself known by means of the fallible, fragile, frail human beings we are. The very thought of this may baffle us somewhat. We might well wonder if it would not have been wiser for the Lord to have chosen to use extraordinary, supernatural, means to manifest Himself to the world, rather than to have chosen to do so using very ordinary and natural means: the vulnerable and flawed persons we are! We might think God would have been wiser to have called and decided to engage sin-proof people in His service – extraordinary men and women who would be His chosen instruments to faithfully proclaim His word. Instead, the Lord has chosen men and women like us... men and women who are very ordinary indeed. It is through small people like us – and many others of the same ilk – that the Lord is pleased to accomplish His great work in our world for the good of all humankind.

As we contemplate the Christ-Child of Bethlehem today along with the magi, let us bear in mind that we are called not only to lay our gifts before His Majesty in a prayer of contemplation, but also to rise from our knees and return to the places from whence we have come here, transformed by what we have experienced in prayer. Having encountered Christ in prayer, we are called to journey by a different way. The other path the magi were led to take for their return journey to their respective homelands, hints at their having been so completely changed by their meeting with Jesus that they were led to walk life's road in another way; taking a new path in life. Our encounter with the person of Jesus in this Eucharist should transform each and every one of us. It should equip us for the mission that the Lord wants to see flow forth from our meeting with Him. Each Eucharistic celebration ends with our being sent forth on mission: to glorify the Lord by our lives; to proclaim the Gospel by our whole way of life.

This morning I was led to mention some of the gifts which the Lord has bestowed upon His Church – gifts which I believe are present in our Christian communities (and to begin with, in each one of our own hearts). I believe these gifts await to be released. Given that, may each one of us dispose our heart to live freely under grace. Freely we have received, freely let us give. May we make ourselves ready to be used in whatever way the Lord indicates to us; in whatever ways He has others solicit us.

The concept of synodality which we are being asked to integrate – indeed, to give flesh to – at this time in the Church's history implies the involvement and participation of the whole People of God in the life and mission of the Church. An authentic manifestation (epiphany) of synodality entails that the multiple and varied gifts of the Spirit which are available to all God's People (which are alive and active in each one of us, whatever our role or rank in the Christian community) should be orchestrated in such a way that God's Word be heard and His work accomplished in the whole world. The Lord's saving presence – which He wants to see extend to all who live on the face of the earth – is at work in the Church. It is expressed through the many spiritual gifts or charisms the Lord shares out among His children for the upbuilding of the Body of Christ. As Church, we need to learn how to develop and use these gifts in harmony. Like the magi who journeyed together to do homage to the Christ-Child and who took a new road, still walking together after having encountered Jesus, we are being called to prepare for the Synod together, so that we may implement the changes it will lead us to undertake together. We cannot satisfy ourselves to think that the synodal path being proposed at the moment is just an option for some members of the Church. It is a path we are all called to walk together. We are all equally responsible for the life and well-being of the People of God; we are all equally responsible (evidently each one at his or her particular place in their own particular way) for the mission of the Church to the world.

If the magi were led from their homeland to Bethlehem, and from there to return to the place from whence they came by a different path, the end point of the journey for them, and for all the People of God (indeed, for the whole world, ultimately), will be the New Jerusalem. This is hinted at in the first line of Isaiah's prophecy this morning and it is spoken of as the end of life's journey for all in the Book of the Apocalypse.

Wherever we are on life's journey today – and that may well be, for some of us, in a place of exile, far removed from where we are called to be – our vocation bids us to hold deep down within us, and before the eyes of our hearts, a longing for the New Jerusalem. Especially in those moments when we feel lost and unsure of the way forward, especially when all appears to be shrouded in darkness and we feel as if we are plunged into confusion, it is so important

for us to think of that place where all will be – indeed already is – enveloped in the radiant light of the splendour of God's glory.

Of the New Jerusalem to which we journey the promise is made: Here God lives among human beings. He will make His home among them; they will be His people, and He will be their God, 'God-with-them'. The light which shines in the New Jerusalem is meant to have dawned already in our hearts. Its radiance is the brightness we are called to share with all around us by the clarity of our lives. The challenge addressed to us on this Epiphany Day is to do just that. May we persevere in our commitment to make Christ's light shine wherever the Lord has placed us; whatever our particular vocation may be; whatever our situation in life is.

Amen!