

## Epiphany 2019

Today is the Feast of the Epiphany. The word epiphany means revelation. Something which was unknown to us reveals itself to us. We discover something. The image we use at times to describe this discovery is the turning on of a light. “The light went on,” we say. For epiphanies are not our productions or inventions. They present themselves to us. We might have prepared for them by study or by our experiences, but when they come they are gifts.

We could say that all SS is an epiphany, a revelation, to us, a gift to us from God. For example, when the author of Isaiah 60, our first reading for today wrote, he was revealing to his audience what he believed would happen in the future. He was telling his people, the Jews, who had experienced the conquest of their nation by foreign powers and then the exile of some of its citizens to Babylon, that God would restore them to their land and that Jerusalem would become a beacon of hope for all the peoples of the world. “Nations shall walk by your light, and kings by your shining radiance. The wealth of nations shall be brought to you.”

In our second reading today from Ephesians we are told that God has now revealed to the present generation what previous generations did not know, namely, that “the Gentiles are coheirs,

members of the same body, and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel.” Although this letter is attributed to St. Paul, most scripture scholars believe it was written after Paul’s death. Nevertheless what it here attributes to Paul is certainly accurate, because earlier letters recognized as coming from Paul himself and Luke’s account of the first days of the Church, the Acts of the Apostles, clearly tell us that both Peter and Paul were absolutely astonished when they experienced the spirit of Jesus coming upon non-Jews. There is that wonderful story in chs 10 and 11 of the Acts. One day Peter, in a trance, sees all kinds of strange animals coming down in a sheet of sorts from heaven, and a voice tells him to slaughter them and eat them. But Peter says: “Certainly not, Sir, because nothing profane or unclear has ever entered my mouth.” But the voice then says: “What God has made clean, you are not to call profane.” And then three men appear at the door asking Peter to go to a Gentile’s house, and God’s spirit tells him to do so. The house belonged to Cornelius, a Roman centurion, who had been told by an angel to send for a man named Peter. Peter goes and when he starts explaining Jesus to Cornelius and his household, the Holy Spirit falls upon them and Peter says: “In truth I see that God shows no partiality. Rather, in every nation whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him.”

In our Gospel today the magi, the astrologers from the East, have seen a star and are following it because it has been revealed to them that the star's appearance is the sign of the birth of a new king. Then, after they have found the child, it is revealed to them in a dream not to return to King Herod to tell him where they had found the new king but to go home by a different route.

So all sorts of revelations or epiphanies in our readings today on this Feast of the Epiphany. The celebration of this Feast began, we are told, in the eastern church and then made its way west. In the east the feast celebrated the Lord's baptism which was considered to be his first appearance or epiphany. The second epiphany in the east was his miracle at the marriage feast of Cana. But when the feast came to the west, it became associated with Christmas and the story of the magi.

The revelation the magi experienced set them on a journey. A journey is the most obvious metaphor for a human life. For life is a movement, a journey. There really is no other way of seeing it. We are born, we grow up, we grow old, and we die. Movement. So a journey. And God's revelation to us come in the course of this journey. I suppose we could say that God is always whispering to us. The problem is that we are not always that good a listener. We

don't hear what God is saying to us, or sometimes even when we do hear, we don't like what we hear and go a different way.

Perhaps today's feast is a chance for us to look at our lives again as a journey, indeed, a journey of faith. We could see them as a quest to find the star, to find God? For when we seek fulfillment and happiness, we are seeking God, for we can only find these by finding God.

We may not realize that we are seeking God in seeking happiness and fulfillment because we have a false notion of God. God is not one object among many; God is not one person among other persons. God is really more a verb than a noun. God is life, God is love, and life and love are not things but activities, relationships. Jesus teaches us that when he tells us that we can find God in and through our relationships with each other. If they are relationships of living and loving, there is God. As the old Latin hymn which we often sing at the foot-washing on Holy Thursday teaches us, "Where there is love, there is God" ("Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est"). When a scribe asks Jesus to explain how one fulfills the great commandment of love of God, what does Jesus tell him? He tells him the story of the Good Samaritan. Love is an action, not a thing. So is God. And the divine love, translated into human action, is

found in Jesus himself. Jesus is, quite simply, divine love in human form. If we live and act as he did, we will reach the end of our journey and find the star. Indeed, the star will be with us on the way.