

CATHOLIC DISTANCE UNIVERSITY

Homily for the Epiphany of the Lord

Sunday, January 8, 2012

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Isaiah 60:1-6

Psalm 72:1, 2, 7, 8, 10-13

Ephesians 3:2-3, 5, 6

Matthew 2:1-12

The word Epiphany translates as ‘manifestation’, or ‘striking appearance’. When the grace of God appears in the world then it is striking, the divine is busting through the walls of the created world. When someone does not lie, or goes out of their way to do something for someone else, then everyone feels it. Today’s feast gives us a good spiritual understanding of how we need to look at the world in the coming year. In fact today’s antiphon says it all: “Behold the Lord, the mighty One, has come; and kingship is in his grasp, and power and dominion.” If we lived under a king we would be much more appreciative of what this antiphon means. We would pay attention to the presence of our Lord. But when religion is washed out of news reports and largely ignored in the public forum it is up to us to realize that the Lord of all the earth has come. Today we celebrate this fact.

We start the readings with the *First Reading* which is taken from the Prophet Isaiah. The first words of the oracle are: “Rise up in splendor, Jerusalem! Your light has come, the glory of the Lord shines upon you.” Jerusalem is the Lord’s city. It is from there that salvation would come. So Isaiah can say: “your light has come.” Light is one of the qualities of the Epiphany, just as when God appeared on Mount Sinai. Another characteristic of epiphany is glory. This is a very rich word that means a weighty presence. Again this important because we have all kinds of people trying to make themselves have a weighty presence but they need backup bands and retinues and public relations groups to try and give them a weighty presence. God simply is weighty because he is God.

Now Jerusalem has this light—they know who God is. The other nations live under “dark clouds”. They do not know who God is. Here is the point of the feast today: “Nations shall walk by your light, and kings by your shining radiance.” We have been so immersed in the idea of religion as a private thing that this world dimension of Catholicism has gotten stifled. In the first speech that he gave as pope, Pope Benedict reminded us that: “we glimpsed the power of God who, through his Church, wants to make a great family of all the peoples by means of the unifying power of Truth and Love.” This Church to which we belong has

a universal reach. It is meant to bring everyone into this great family of truth and love. Are we up to that task?

As we sing *Psalm 72*, we pick up this theme: “Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.” This is our program of life. Then we sing of the Lord having all of the different attributes of a king: he will rule wisely; he will judge justly; all the powers of the earth will pay him tribute; he will have a special responsibility for the poor. These are also the signs of the reign of the Messiah. And as we know Christ is that Messiah.

In the *Second Reading*, writing to a Gentile community—so these are people of the nations—Paul reminds the people of the community: “it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: that the Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.” Here is the universal message of truth and love beginning to spread around the Mediterranean Sea, church community by church community. For us the problem is that today ‘church’ is not a popular word with a whole baggage of false accusations about being authoritarian. Yet regardless we still have to teach about the Church and its role in the world. Nobody said being a Catholic is easy.

In the *Gospel* we have the account of the visit of the magi, the wise men from the east. The nations who are looking are seeing the coming king. Most nations of course are not looking! The wise men pay homage to the baby and give him gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh. Here is the tribute given to royalty. But one can add that gold is a royal gift, frankincense is the incense offered at prayer and myrrh is one of the spices used in preparing a body for burial.

We are beginning to see the manifestations of God’s reaching out to his people, all people wherever they are so that they will become one people rooted in love and truth.