



The Baptism of the Lord

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Pastor's Column

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Epiphany—A Festival of Inclusion

A number of Parishioners have asked that I post my Epiphany homily as a Pastor's Column for the Bulletin...

Mark Twain once said that he put a dog and a cat in a cage together as an experiment, to see if they could get along. They did.

So he put in a bird, pig, and a goat. They too got along fine after a few adjustments.

Then he put in a Baptist, a Presbyterian, and a Catholic, and all hell broke loose.

Mark Twain did not even bother putting together a Christian, a Muslim, and a Jew. That was unthinkable in his days.

In today's world, however, it has become obvious that Christians live in the same cage, in the same city, in the same world, with people of other religions.

We do live in a cage! It is called the Global Village. Because of social media, and air travel, we are all thrown together. Either we learn to live together and respect differences, or we will destroy ourselves and our planet.

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Epiphany. We remember the Magi who came from the East to worship the infant Jesus.

They came guided by a star. Being nature worshippers who had no scriptures, God revealed Himself to them through the means available to them in their own religion.

Through the stars they were able to learn of the birth of Jesus and find their way to him.

They came as pagans, they worshipped Jesus as pagans, and they went home as pagans.

They did not either convert to Judaism or to Christianity.

Their worship was acceptable to God and God directed them in their journey home through a dream.

This shows that God does have a relationship with people of other religions who are neither Jews nor Christians.

The Feast of Christmas tells us that God's Word, Jesus, became flesh.

This Feast of Epiphany tells us the implications of the Word become flesh. The Word that became flesh, Jesus, is God's love for everyone on the face of the Earth, not just for a few, not just for the many, but for all people.

Christians are crazy if we think that one day the whole world will be Christian. Muslims are crazy if they think that one day the whole world will be Islamic.

If that becomes one's intent, be it Christian or Islamic, all hell will break loose. It has happened in the past, and it is happening now in our present day. As long as we keep trying to convert one another, this will keep happening.

The Feast of Epiphany teaches us that, as Christians, our first responsibility is to not evangelize in the hope of making people Christian, but our first responsibility is to love one another, because that is what God's Word is.

All of us on the face of the earth, whatever religion or no religion, are capable of love. That is the call of Epiphany.

When we love, truly love, then, secondarily, we are evangelizing, not with words, but with actions.

Mother Theresa of Calcutta is a perfect model of the Epiphany message:

In her lifetime, Mother Teresa of Calcutta had treated over 50,000 dying people. Her Order, the Missionaries of Charity, today counts over 1,600 sisters in more than 60 countries around the world. She was honored by presidents and applauded by prime ministers. 50 years after she set foot in India, she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

Mother Teresa's vision of the ministry of Jesus Christ and our sharing in that ministry, as Christ's embrace of today's world is simple but challenging.

She once described it this way: "Everyone is created by God and deserving of love. It does not matter if the person is male or female, Muslim or Christian or Jew. It does not matter the person's race or nationality. All that matters is that the person is created by God and deserves love. My sisters are there simply to give love."

It seems fitting that Mother Teresa entered upon her life of ministry in India on the Feast of the Epiphany because the vision she developed is exactly the vision of this feast, described in today's readings.

The Epiphany proclaims that everyone is created by God and deserving of love. The person's race, religion, nationality, or sexual orientation does not matter.

All that matters is that this creature of God deserves love. And we—the arms of Jesus that now embrace the world—are simply here to give love.

The Epiphany vision, as phrased by Mother Teresa, is simple, challenging and utterly profound: Everyone is created by God and deserves love. Everyone—male, female, Muslim, Jew, Christian, Buddhist, atheist, agnostic, black, white, yellow, brown, gay, straight.

Everyone—people who are clumsy in their social graces, people who are imprisoned, thieves, murderers, rapists, and abusers... even Democrats and Republicans.

Because we Christians are Christ's embrace of the world, we are here simply to give love.

When we live out this Epiphany vision, we become God's epiphany for the world. We turn into stars to guide others to Christ.

The original Epiphany gifts were gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Today only one gift suffices: love. On this Feast of Epiphany, there is no greater way to adore Christ than to offer everyone love without distinction, without qualification, and without hesitation.

The Feast of Epiphany is a Festival of Inclusion. As we celebrate this day, may we be willing to ask ourselves:

"Whom am I letting into my life and whom am I keeping out?"

Fr. Mike