



Homily Notes

Jan 4, 2014: Feast of Epiphany
Is. 60:1-6; Eph.3: 2-6; Mt. 2: 1-12

Our Pilgrimage to Christ

The word Epiphany, which means *appearance* or *manifestation*, marks Jesus' first appearance to the Gentiles. "Epiphany" refers to God's self-revelation as well as the revelation of Jesus as His Son. It is a celebration older than the feast of Christmas, having originated in the East in the late second century. The feast commemorates the coming of the Magi as the first manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles, in the Western Church. In the Eastern Church, it is also the commemoration of the baptism of Christ.

The angels revealed Jesus to the shepherds, and the star revealed him to the Magi, who had already received hints of Him from Jewish scriptures. Later, God the Father revealed Jesus' identity at His baptism in the Jordan. In the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus revealed himself as the promised Messiah. These multiple revelations are all suggested by the Feast of the Epiphany. Today's gospel teaches us how Christ enriches those who bring Him their hearts. Since the Magi came with joy in their hearts to visit the Christ child, God allowed them to see wondrous things.

Epiphany can be looked on as a symbol for our pilgrimage through life to Christ. The feast invites us to see ourselves as images of the Magi, a people on a journey to Christ. Today's gospel also tells us the story of the magi's encounter with the evil

King Herod. This encounter symbolizes three reactions to Jesus' birth: hatred, indifference, and adoration. a) A group of people headed by Herod plan to destroy Jesus. b) Another group composed of priests and scribes ignores Jesus. c) A third group, shepherds and the magi, adore Jesus and offer themselves to Him.

Let us worship Jesus every day at Mass with the gold of our love, the myrrh of our humility and the frankincense of our adoration. Let us offer our very selves, promising God that we will use His blessings by doing good to our fellow human beings. In the Christmas stable, the magi got transformed themselves. So too must we. What Christ wants from us is a reformation of ourselves. Just as the Wise Men returned home to begin the work of transforming their kingdoms, we too must go home and transform the world around us.

Johnson Simon

Jan 4, Feast of Baptism of Our Lord

Is. 12:1-6; 1 Jn. 5: 1-9; Mk. 1: 7-11

Inspired by God

The year is young. The old year is gone together with its unfulfilled dreams, disappointments and failures. We have made resolutions and set goals and objectives for the New Year. But we are yet to start implementing them. In many ways we are in a similar position as Jesus was at the beginning of today's gospel story. Jesus was about to put private life behind him and embark on his public work. He knew what the needs were, he had his plans, and he was ready to start. But before throwing himself into the implementation of his plans and dreams he needed to do one more thing. He needed to get baptism. If the thirty years of private life he led in obedience to his parents was his remote preparation for his life's work, the baptism in the River Jordan was the immediate preparation. As we celebrate the baptism of Jesus today, it would be in order to ask ourselves: Why did Jesus submit to baptism before embarking on his life's work? And what can we learn from this on how to proceed with our own lives' ambitions and dreams?

Baptism is a ceremony that requires three principal parties: the individual to be baptized, God in whose name the individual is baptized, and the baptizer who acts in the name of the community of faith. Traditionally we have tended to see baptism mainly from the individual's point of view and so have stressed the aspect of cleansing from original sin and birth to new life. We have also somewhat stressed the community aspect of baptism as entrance into a community of faith, becoming a member of the visible church. What we have not stressed sufficiently is the divine aspect which, in fact, is what comes out so strongly in the story of Jesus' baptism. For Jesus who was about to begin his public work, baptism was primary a decision to unite himself with God, his purposes with God's purposes, his energies with God's energy.

The story of Jesus' baptism shows us that if we are to live out our baptism, the first thing we should do is to lay down at God's feet all our plans and ambitions, yes, and our whole lives as well. Often we are hindered not by a lack of idea of what we should be doing but a lack of strength to put it into practice. Living out our baptism means allowing the Holy Spirit whom we received to lead us and empower us to put into action the noble dreams that God Himself has inspired in us. The New Year is a good time to start.

Vibin Varghese

Jan 18, 2014: Second Sunday of the Year
I Sam 3: 3-10, 19; I Cor 6: 13-20; Jn 1: 35-42

Rebuilding Broken Lives

Today's theme is divine vocation. Everyone is called by God to be something, to do something for others with his life and with his unique gifts. Hence today's readings remind us of our personal call to become a witness to the Lamb of God and to lead a life of holiness and purity. We are told that each of us as Christians is personally called to discipleship, which demands our ongoing response of commitment. The first reading describes how Yahweh called Samuel to His service. In the second reading St. Paul reminds us that we too have a divine call and it is a call to holiness. He argues that we have to keep our bodies pure and

our souls holy because in baptism we have become parts of Christ's body and the temple of the Holy Spirit. In the gospel, John the Baptist introduces Jesus to two of his disciples as the "Lamb of God." They follow Jesus, accepting his call to "*come and see*." They find out his residence, stay with him for a while and then bring Simon to Jesus, introducing Jesus to him as the Messiah. Thus today's gospel describes the call of the first apostles.

Our call is to rebuild broken lives. Like the missionary call of Samuel and the apostles, we too are called. Our call is to rebuild broken lives, reconciling them to God's love and justice through Christ Jesus our Lamb and Lord. Through baptism into the Body of Christ we are empowered and enabled by the Holy Spirit to free the oppressed. Through the love of the Lamb of God, we are called to better the lot and improve the broken spirit of all who have been exiled from the possibility of hope, exiled from God's righteousness, burdened by the yoke of spiritual, social, economic, and political dislocation. In other words, through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the glorified Lamb, we are called to empower the human spirit with a sense of identity and purpose.

Jesuraja Fernando

Jan 25, 2015: Third Sunday of the Year
Jonah 3: 1-5, 10; I Cor 7: 29-31; Mark 1: 14-20
Being Shining Lights in the World

God's call and the response expected from each of us is the main theme of today's readings. No matter to what life, work or ministry God calls us, God first calls us to convert, to reform, to repent -- to continually become new people. Those who constantly reform will be able to follow where God leads. All the three readings today underline the absolute necessity of such repentance and ready response to God's call. The first reading tells us how the prophet Jonah did not respond quickly when God called him because he hated the gentile people of Nineveh and

thought that they were not worthy of God's gracious mercy. God had to punish him to make him properly respond to His call a second time to preach repentance to the people of Nineveh. The people of Nineveh promptly responded to God's word preached by His prophet. In the second reading Paul urges the community in Corinth to lose no time accepting the message of the gospel because Jesus' second coming can occur at any time. The gospel also describes the call of the first disciples and their ready response. Jesus' call to the people is described as a call to repentance and belief in the "good news" he preached. In describing the call of Jesus' first disciples, today's Gospel emphasizes how we sinners are to respond with total commitment, even by abandoning our accustomed style of life and family.

Every one of us is called by God, both individually and collectively. The mission of preaching, teaching and healing which Jesus began in Galilee is now the responsibility of the Church. Our own unique vocation and relationship with the risen Lord are the same as that of the universal Church. Be we monk, priest, married or single laity, we are all called, and in this call we become what God wants us to be. The call, of course, began with our baptism and the other sacraments of initiation; it is strengthened throughout the years with the Eucharist and reconciliation, healed and consoled by anointing, made manifest by matrimony or holy orders. God is relentless in calling us back to Himself even when we stray away from Him. Let us be thankful to God for His Divine grace of calling us to be members of the true Church, the one and only Catholic, Holy and Apostolic Church. Let us make personal efforts to see the light of Christ and to grow in holiness by learning the truths that are revealed through the Holy Catholic Church and by using its Sacraments. Let us be shining lights in the world as Christ was and make a personal effort to bring others to the truth and the light so that they may rejoice with us in the mystical Body of Christ, the invisible Kingdom of God.

Arun Vincent

Feb 1, 2014: IV Sunday of the Year
Deut 18:15-20; I Cor 7:32-35; Mark 1:21-28

Authority that Liberates

The common theme of today's readings is divine authority reflected by the prophets of the Old Testament in their messages, by the apostles including St. Paul in the New Testament in their writings and teaching, and by Jesus in his teaching and healing ministry. In today's gospel Mark describes one sample Sabbath day of Jesus' public life. He joins in public worship in the synagogue as a practicing Jew, heals the sick, he drives out evil spirits -- and he prays privately. Since anyone could be invited to explain the Holy Scripture in synagogue worship, Jesus was invited. People immediately noticed that Jesus spoke with authority and healed with divine power.

This passage begins and ends with comments about Jesus' authority as a teacher (1:21-22 and 1:27-28). In between is an exorcism (1:23-26), pointing out to a connection between Jesus' teachings and his supernatural authority. Moreover, this is the first episode in Jesus' ministry which Mark recounts after the call of the disciples. Jesus' authority is also the main theme in the collection of stories in 2:1 and 3:6. Verse 2:10 refers to the authority of Jesus to declare to people God's compassion in forgiving their sins (2:10). Mark in his gospel repeatedly returns to the theme that Jesus' teaching with authority gave him followers, and healing with divine power liberated people from illness and demoniac possession. The Catholic and apostolic Church derives her teaching authority from her founder Jesus.

Use Your God given authority for liberation and service: Genuine authority is an ability and awesome responsibility that enables people to transcend themselves and use their innate gifts for the welfare of others. Jesus did not come to rule and control people, "*not to be served but to serve.*" He came to make people free. Jesus frees us from the evil spirits that keep us from praying, loving and sharing our blessings with others. He frees us from all the 'evil spirits' of fear, compulsions, selfishness, anger, resentment and hostility. "*I have come that they may have life,*

life in abundance.” So Jesus should be a source of liberation for us. May he free us from all those spirits which make us deaf, dumb, blind, lame and paralyzed, physically and spiritually!

Arun Vincent

Feb 8, 2015: V Sunday of the Year

Job 7:1-4, 6-7; I Cor 9: 16-19, 22-23; Mk 1: 29-39

Bring Healing and Wholeness

The readings today challenge us to go courageously beyond people’s expectations by doing good as Jesus did instead of brooding over pain and suffering in the world. Today’s gospel describes how Jesus had just finished the first day of his public ministry at Capernaum on a Sabbath day. Before noon, he took part in the synagogue worship, taught with authority, exorcised a demon, healed Simon’s mother-in-law and in the evening he “*cured many who were sick with various diseases, and drove out many demons.*” Instead of reveling in the glory he attained, Jesus rose early next morning and went off “to a deserted place” to pray in order to recharge his spiritual batteries. While the gospel presents Jesus enthusiastically preparing for his second day’s missionary work, the first reading details Job’s attitude in striking contrast to Jesus.’ In the midst of his long suffering, Job is speaking of the tedium and futility of life. Job’s words describe the miseries of human existence. The second reading, on the other hand, presents Paul as a true and dynamic follower of Jesus, ready to do something extra for his Lord. Knowing that he is called to do more than just preach the Gospel, he resolves to preach without recompense. Pointing out the spontaneous response of Peter’s mother-in-law after she had been healed by Jesus -- namely, “*waiting on them at table*”-- today’s gospel teaches us that true discipleship means getting involved in selfless service of others.

Bringing *healing and wholeness* is Jesus’ ministry even today. The words “healing,” “health,” “wholeness,” “wellness,” and “holiness” all share the same etymological root, meaning “full” or “complete.” At whatever stage of life we may be -- whether child, adolescent, middle-aged, or older -- we recognize

implicitly our own deficiencies. Hence we need the Lord's strength not only to make us well, but to make us whole. This means that we are all in need of healing. We all need healing of our minds, our memories and our broken relationships. Jesus now uses counselors, doctors, friends or even strangers in His healing ministry. Let us look at today's Gospel and identify with the mother-in-law of Peter. Let us ask for the ordinary healing we need in our own lives. When we are healed let us not forget to thank Jesus for his goodness, mercy, and compassion by serving others. Our own healing process is completed only when we are ready to help others in their needs and focus on things outside ourselves. Let us also be instruments of Jesus' healing by visiting the sick and praying for their healing.

Dino Varghese

Feb 15, 2015: VI Sunday of the Year

Lev 13: 1-2, 44-46; 1Cor 10:31-11:1; Mk 1: 40-45

Making Us Clean

Purity or holiness of soul coming from God and cleansing our lives is the main theme of today's readings. The first reading and the gospel story teach the theme of liberation from bodily and ritual impurity as a sign of internal holiness. This liberation is symbolized by the precautions against contracting leprosy given in the first reading and the healing of the leper described in the gospel. The first reading shows the ancient Jewish attitude toward leprosy and the rules for quarantining lepers. All this comes as a background to Jesus' healing of a leper. In fact, all three readings contain reflections on the notion of "social acceptability" even when people are different from us. In today's responsorial psalm, the psalmist exhorts us to rejoice in the Lord because He purifies us from our sins: *"I confessed my faults to the LORD, and you took away my guilt."* The psalm serves as a mini-treatise on reconciliation - the meaning of the spiritual leprosy of sin and how we are forgiven by a sacramental encounter with God. *"I turn to you, Lord, in times of trouble, and you fill me with the joy of salvation."* In today's epistle, St.

Paul exhorts us to testify to our healing from the leprosy of sin by living changed lives, expressed by our doing *“everything for the glory of God”* and for the salvation of others.

Trust in the mercy of a forgiving God who assures us that our sins are forgiven and that we are clean. We are forgiven and made spiritually clean if we repent of our sins. This is because God is a God of love who waits patiently for us. No matter how many sins we have committed or how badly we have behaved, we know God forgives us. We do not have to bribe God to forgive us. His forgiveness is offered freely--all we have to do is ask for it. The only condition required of us is that we ask for forgiveness with a repentant heart. We need only kneel before him and ask him, *“Lord, if you will, you can make me clean”* We are sure to hear his words of absolution, *“Very well-- your sins are forgiven and you are clean.”* This is what the sacrament of reconciliation is all about. **Albert A C**

Feb 22, 2015: I Sunday of Lent
Gen 9: 8-15; I Peter 3: 18-22; Mark 1: 12-15
Radical Dependence on God

The primary purpose of Lent is to lead us to *“repentance”* in the sense of conversion - change of values, ideals and ambitions through fasting, prayer and mortification. Lenten observances are intended to lead us to our annual solemn renewal of baptismal vows on Holy Saturday, the day of our recommitment to our baptismal vows. We are called by our baptisms to live justly, to love our neighbor as our God, and to build the kingdom by our acts of goodness. That is why all the three readings chosen as today’s scripture refer to baptism directly or indirectly. The first reading describes how Noah’s family is saved from the deluge waters by God’s special providence and how renewed his ‘friendship covenant’ with mankind. It symbolizes how we are saved through the water of baptism which cleanses us of sin and makes us one with Christ. In the second reading Peter tells us how Noah’s episode prefigured baptism. In the Gospel we are told how Jesus faced and defeated the tempter by his forty days

of prayer and penance in the desert immediately after his baptism. Today's psalm is an exquisite penitential prayer, humbly acknowledging human insufficiency and our radical dependence upon God and His mercy and forgiveness.

Lent is the time of renewal of life by penance and prayer. Formerly the six weeks of Lent meant a time of severe penance as a way of purifying ourselves from our sinful habits and getting ready to celebrate the *Paschal mystery* (the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ) with a renewed commitment to follow Christ. Now the Church leaves the Lenten practice of penance to the good will and generosity of individual Christians. However, Lent should be a time for personal reflection on where we stand as Christians accepting the gospel challenges in thoughts, words and deeds. It is also a time to assess our relation to our family, friends, working colleagues and other people we come in contact with, especially those of our parish. We should examine whether we are able to give any positive contribution to other people's lives and to eradicate the abuses which are part of our society.

Vanathu Antony

AJRS and the Staff and Students of Papal
Seminary, Pune, India, are glad to wish the readers
Merry Christms and Happy New Year!