

EPIPHANY I

“And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my fathers business?”

from the second chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke

Today’s gospel describes a moment in the life of the Holy Family that is similar to a moment most parents have experience with their children at one time or another (or perhaps more than one). It is at such a moment that parents come to realize that their child is becoming independent – that, for better or worse, the child is starting to make decisions for himself.

St. Luke tells us that, during a trip from Nazareth to Jerusalem for Passover, St. Mary and St. Joseph get separated from the 12 year old Jesus. After three days of anxious searching, they find him in the temple where he is debating theology with the rabbis. Jesus is seemingly unconcerned for their anguish, telling them “Did you not know that I had to be about my Father’s business – in my Father’s house?”

Whatever might have happened before - and we have no idea what had happened before - at this point Joseph and Mary can have no doubt that Jesus knows exactly who he really is. Even more to the

point, he knows who his real father is and that his heavenly Father has the final authority in his life. St. Luke says they did not understand what he told them – but he cannot mean that they did not know the meaning of his words. What they could not understand was what all of this would mean for their future together.

Would Jesus say, “I am going to remain here to study the Bible with these scholars” or might he say, “You two cannot even keep track of me when we are away from home – you are not competent to be in charge of the Son of God”. Or, would he simply utter the standard adolescent’s lament that “I know what’s best for me, I’m going to be my own person and make my own decisions now”?

Instead, St. Luke reports, “He went down with them, and came to Nazareth and was subject unto them”. It is clear that Jesus saw no conflict between being about his heavenly Father’s business, on the one hand, and remaining with his earthly parents and obeying them, on the other.

What united the Holy Family - and what can unite any family who really wants to have this kind of union – is if every member of the family agrees that the most important thing in life is finding out the

will of God as it is revealed in the Bible and in the teachings of the church – and then trying to seek it.

Once you come any where near the sphere of Christian influence, you can no longer avoid the issue of God and obeying God. People who are contemplating marriage cannot pretend that the will of God does not matter. People who are already married, and thinking about having children, cannot pretend that the will of God does not matter. Married people who are thinking of splitting up cannot ignore the will of God. Parents who are concerned about the nurture and education of their children cannot pretend that the will of God does not matter.

Epiphany talks about how Christ showed himself to the world to help us figure out how we can show him to the world. Today's epistle goes along with the gospel in suggesting that the most obvious way we manifest Christ to the world is by leading lives that are committed to doing what Christ wants done.

An important part of consecration prayer says, “”And here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies to be a reasonable, holy and living sacrifice unto thee””. These words are said on behalf of all communicants in response to

St. Paul's command in today's epistle. He tells us to "present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service". This we are obliged to do. In effect, after we have represented Jesus' sacrifice on Calvary in the forms of bread and wine, we climb onto the altar and sacrifice ourselves – we offer our whole being to God just as Jesus did.

We are asking God to use us to do his will, just as he used Jesus to do his will. The first step in that direction is to get a proper view of things. We can do that by looking at everything from God's perspective. **THAT** is a life-changing experience.

It is what St. Paul means when he writes, "Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, acceptable and perfect will of God".

Jesus says, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." To be pure in heart is to be focused upon one thing – finding out what God's will *is* in your life, and then doing it. You cannot do that apart from the Bible. You cannot do that apart from the sacraments. You cannot do that without asking for guidance and help through prayer.

Our goal, as Christians, is to show Jesus to other people so he can save them as he has saved us. It's all about doing God's will – becoming, through God's gracious help, what Jesus was by his nature – subject in all things to the divine authority – always about our Father's business.