

Epiphany 111a

The message of the Epiphany season is the message of the coming and showing forth of God in Christ. Now, in a certain sense, it is strange thing to speak about the coming and showing forth of God, because, surely, God is always present and always manifest. He is present and manifest everywhere and always in all his works, for those who have eyes to see. “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork.” (Psalm 19.1) As St. Paul says, “the invisible things of God from the creation of the world is clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead.” The whole creation is witness to the mystery of the divine power, but in that mystery, God himself is still hidden.

Epiphany is about the revelation, the uncovering of that mystery: “to make all men see what is the dispensation of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath hid in God.” Epiphany is not about the showing forth of God in his works, but the showing forth of God in himself: the showing forth of God in Christ, who is “very God of very God.” The very life of God himself, the mystery hidden from the beginning of the world, is made manifest in the world, manifest in our midst. The Gospel

lessons for this season always speak to us of the showing forth of some aspect of the divine life; the divine wisdom, the divine power, the divine love.

But that divine life is manifest in Christ in order that we might be partakers of it. That is to say, there is to be an epiphany, a showing forth of divine life in us. That is the continual theme of the Epistle lessons for the Sundays of this season. These Epistle lessons, mostly from St. Paul's letter to the Romans, form a marvelously coherent series. They build upon one another, and in every case they are significantly related to the particular Sunday's Gospel.

For the Epiphany season, the general pattern is this; the Gospel lesson always reveals some facet of the showing forth of God in Christ; the corresponding Epistle lesson always reveals how the particular showing forth of God has also a showing forth in our life as Christians. Two Sunday's ago the Gospel, for instance, spoke to us of Christ as revealing the wisdom of God in the midst of the temple; the corresponding Epistle urged upon us the showing forth of that wisdom in our life in the church: "Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of

your mind, that ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” (Romans 12.2)

That is to say divine wisdom, manifest in Christ, is to be manifest in us: not just as individuals, but as members of one another in the body of Christ, “according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.”

Today’s Gospel lesson is the very well-know story of Jesus at the wedding feast in Cana, in Galilee. It is Jesus’ first miracle, “the beginning of signs,” as St. John says. The miracles are always signs, symbolic acts, and in this case, the occasion itself, the wedding feast, is a sign. It is the sign of the marriage between God and the soul, “the mystical union between Christ and the Church.” At the wedding feast, Jesus changes water into wine and that is a miracle, that is to say, a sign, a sign of God’s power to transform creation. It is the sign that in union with Christ, our life is to be changed; it is the sign of God’s power to give us new life in his spirit.

It is in that context, and with that understanding that today’s Epistle lesson should be read. St. Paul begins by reminding us of our gifts. Perhaps, to some of us, it seems that we

have no gifts, or that our gifts don't amount to much. Mary says "they have no wine." But, by grace, we do have gifts; by the power of God, by God's grace, water is changed to wine. By the grace of God, we do have gifts, manifold and differing. Some have the gift of prophecy; some have the gift of ministry, some have the gift of teaching, and some have the gift of exhortation. Some have gifts of giving, some have gifts of ruling, some have gifts of mercy, and most have the gift of love.

Divine wisdom, divine power, divine love are manifested in the gifts of grace: that is the epiphany of God in us. St. Paul urges us to those gifts with honesty and modesty. "fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope: patient in tribulation; continuing constant in prayer; distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality." What he speaks of is really a recreated, a transformed life: God changes water into wine.

The lesson concludes with a call to be charitable. "Bless them which persecute you; bless and curse not. Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that do weep." But how difficult all that really is. It is a marvelous vision of new spiritual life, but can we really do it? Can we even really try? Perhaps it seems that we have no wine left.

But as today's collect reminds us, it is God who governs all things in heaven and earth; it is He who makes all things new. It is He who changes water into wine, not the wine of our own ambitions and ideals, not the wine of our self-intoxication, but the good wine of His grace. "Whatever He saith unto you, do it." Those who act in faith will finally surely know that he has "saved the best wine until now."