

## Epiphany Homily

One of the greatest responsibilities that I have in my current job is hiring people. I look at this as a sacred mission. After all, what is at stake, which is the intellectual and social emotional formation of our students, is too precious to settle for anything other than the best. I want good educators to that are not only capable of making the curriculum accessible to every student, but also are able and willing to develop healthy relationships with them. For you see, I want all my kids to look forward to come to school every day.

Because of this, I have been told by many candidates that they were surprised by the nature of the interview questions. They've often described the questions as too personal and harder than answering questions solely on teaching and learning. To which I always respond: "don't you see that these questions have everything to do with teaching and learning?" Take for instance these two-part fill-in-the-blank question where candidates have to complete two sentences:

- a) The most rewarding aspect about being a teacher is \_\_\_\_\_.
- b) The most challenging aspect about being a teacher is \_\_\_\_\_.

Most of the people that ultimately get offered a position at our school complete these sentences in this way:

- a) *The most rewarding aspect about being a teacher is that AHA moment! It is seeing a kid's face get brightened when they suddenly realize that they understood a particular concept. It is to hear them say out loud "I get it"!*
- b) *The most challenging aspect about being a teacher is not being able to reach every student. Another challenging aspect is keeping students motivated after they have*

*experienced that aha moment, as that moment is but a single point in their educational journey.*

Now, not long ago our church went through the cyclical advent journey. That contemplative and spiritual time loop that moves us from hope, to peace, to joy, to love, and which culminates with the realization that salvation has come to us as a vulnerable child.

Hence we have heavenly choirs singing Glory to God in the highest; we have fearful shepherds being told not to be afraid but to rejoice and go and worship; and we have the entire universe communicating with all humanity to let us know that God's love for creation does not have national borders. God's healing and redemptive grace is visited upon everyone in the world. The good news of the child born in Bethlehem is meant for the entire cosmos. This is what the feast of the epiphany emphasizes. For this reason God's outrageous love for humanity cannot be celebrated in a single feast on December 25th, nor can it be understood as single moment in history. What our creator has done (and is actively doing for us) is so out of there, that it takes time for us, the church, to unpack it, savor it, internalize it, and share it with the world around us.

Like students in a school, we cannot expect to know everything about God's love for us based on a single event or single teaching. Like the shepherds, Mary, Joseph, and the Magi, we need to be fully present and be opened and humbled enough to know that there will always be more about this mystery than what we experience.

Take for instance the popular understanding of the feast of the epiphany: This feast celebrates that the son of God came to save all humanity. Great! But so what?

What does salvation look like? What is salvation?

I'd like to suggest that if we want to go deeper into the understanding what this feast is we have to redefine what salvation means. While many of us have been indoctrinated to look at salvation as an eschatological concept, this is to say, what happens at the end of our lives and at the end of the world, I would ask us to look at salvation as relational.

To experience salvation is to experience being in relationship with our beloved.

To be saved is to be connected.

Salvation means being in an life-giving and other-centered experience between the lover and the beloved and the universe that engulfs them.

Hence the popular saying amongst physicians, mental health professionals, and spiritual directors: "It is the relationship that heals." "It is the relationship that gives meaning to life's struggles and achievements." "It is the relationship that saves."

To understand this feast in this way is to understand that being fully accepted, loved, and invited into a relationship with God is a never ending epiphany experience that last for eternity.

In other words, we are in a life-long epiphany journey that will continue even after we have passed through the threshold of dying and rising as our God will continue to pursue that relationship forever, and ever, and ever.

So take a deep breath and rejoice.

Keep in mind that we don't need to fully know what God's will is for our lives in order to experience this ongoing epiphany. In fact there are many times in which we will be travelling not fully sure of what we are doing. During those moments I would invite you to pray Thomas Merton's prayer:

"I have no idea where I am going.

I do not see the road ahead of me.

I cannot know for certain where it will end.

Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so.

But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you.

And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.

I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.

And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it."

That's to be in relationship with our beloved.

Last, but certainly not least, before we continue with our celebration, let us remember that this is neither a passive feast nor a passive journey.

It is intentional.

It is focused on justice.

It is experienced in service of others.

And it is fueled by love.

Like Serene Jones, the President and Johnston Family Professor for Religion and Democracy at the Union Theological Seminary in New York City, reminds us:

In order to experience holiness and healthy relationship with God we need to be prophets of justice and we must call out injustice whenever we see it. Remember, civil disobedience lies at the heart of the epiphany story: The magi received an unjust order from a vindictive and evil tyrant. They defied him. May we do likewise!”

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