

Church of the Good Shepherd  
and  
St. John the Evangelist

3 Epiphany  
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Fr. Bill McGinty

**“Place Your Worry in the Hands of the Lord!”**

We live in worrying times, perhaps the most worrying times in all the 232 years of this nation. We live in a time of war, when underdeveloped nations are arming themselves with nuclear weapons. Fanatics of every persuasion dominate news headlines. Terrorists strike at will, protected by puppet regimes. Scientists tell us that the planet is now warming so fast, that all previous predictions of Global catastrophe are wide of the mark by decades. The Polar caps will disappear. CO2 levels will rise as the Tundra melts. Storms, hurricanes and higher sea levels will be the norm. Life on earth will end and that end is in sight within the life span of our great grandchildren.

As if that is not enough, economists are pessimistic about the economy and claim that not only are we entering a recession, but in fiscal terms we now belong to China.

It is at times like these that we long for a Messiah. We long for a figure of strength to lead us to the Promised Land. We would settle for an Abe Lincoln, a Teddy Roosevelt, an FDR or even a Harry Truman, but there is none in sight. Scanning the horizon of political hopefuls, we despair to the extent: that when a movie comes out suggesting Robin Williams for president, instead of laughing at the thought, we give it serious consideration.

Can you remember in the 1950's and 60's that at every important event there was always one lunatic with a sandwich board that read: “The end of the world is nigh.”

You don't see them as much today. Perhaps, because we can see all the bad stuff instantly on TV and the Internet.

In 1969 I had a friend who became a Trappist Monk on Caldey Island, three miles off the southern coast of Wales. There he has been ever since. Wars have come and gone, disasters too, and he has never known about them. His is a life dedicated to prayer, study, work and silence. It is a life that many admire and envy. In recent years the monks of Caldey have had many vacations join them. From having poor numbers in the community in the 1980's, their numbers in the last twenty years have increased dramatically. These new vacations to monastic and religious life all have a common characteristic, they are not young. They are men in Middle age and older. Some have lost their spouses; others retired or simply decided to change their career. They bring a wealth of experience, engineers, business men, teachers and two doctors. Alas, as yet there have been no lawyers.

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# Church of the Good Shepherd and St. John the Evangelist

As much as you and I can see and understand why men and women would embrace a life of prayer as a second career, we also know that for most of us, we may worry about the economy, the war and poor leadership, but when we look at the world for good or bad we realize that it's the only world we have and somehow we have to make the best of it.

Jesus begins his ministry in today's Gospel account from St Matthew. The world that he begins work in is dominated by many of the same evils as ours. For over 50 years the Romans have dominated Palestine. Four years before the birth of Jesus the Jews rebelled only to be crushed by the Roman army. Over 2,000 rebels were crucified, as a consequence.

Into the poverty of Galilee comes Jesus making his home in the fishing village of Capernaum. It is a world of subsistence living, dependent on weather, climate and harvests. People are poor and life is short and bleak.

Matthew's Gospel quotes the great prophet Isaiah and brings an element of hope. "Repent for the Kingdom of heaven has come near." There is a sense in which Jesus **is** the Kingdom of heaven. His teaching, healing and message elevate his listeners to a new level of existence. He brings to them life, the story that can conquer all ills, all defeat and even poverty. To this crusade he recruits Simon Peter and Andrew his brother, James and his brother John. In all these Gospels there is nothing to distinguish these men. They are ordinary, working people, fishermen with no formal education. Yet Jesus chooses them.

It is an amazing story, when you think that a young 30 year old Rabbi could make such an impression that men who were older would leave everything to follow him.

There is an excitement about today's Gospel as there is about the beginning of any new ministry or era that promises change. You might imagine that Jesus would have attracted the attention of bright, intelligent men like Paul, the Rabbi's and Israel's leaders; but that is not the case. Instead Jesus followed by the humble, the poor, the disinherited and the faithful.

When Paul does become a Christian Jesus is long dead. He writes to the Corinthians to ask why he is hearing of discord and conflict in their ranks. He points out to them that they cannot be divided according to who baptized them or who they accept as their leader; rather all must be followers of Jesus.

And that is the message for us also in all that we do, Christ must be our center and it must be him that we follow. Asking yourself the question: "How can I help bring about the Kingdom of heaven?" Is to ask: "How can I make Jesus an effective force in my life?"

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This week I pondered this question with great seriousness. “How can I make Jesus an effective force in my life?” I asked myself that question because I’ve grown tired of almost succeeding with so many aspects of ministry, but never quite making it. It is frustrating at times to see where you would like to go, but never quite succeed in getting there.

At times like that I pray the same prayer and I pray it over and over:

“Lord Jesus, you told your disciples anything you ask the Father in my name you will receive. I pray that you will send us your Holy Spirit that we may succeed in being the Kingdom of God in this place. Lord Jesus send us your Spirit.”

This prayer is based on the solitary notion that we have to at times let God do the work in the place that he has called us to. It is almost as if we are saying,

“It is you who chose this place. Let your will, your salvation and your Spirit bring about your Father’s will.” It’s important that we realize that this is God’s work and his ministry.

To do that we really need to return to today’s Gospel and put ourselves right there on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Closing our eyes we can see the whole scene unfold before us. There is the shoreline, with the boats drawn up out of the water. The nets are hanging up on poles with the local fishermen mending them. Along comes the young Rabbi walking along the waters edge. He stops by the Fishermen to say: “Come follow me. I will make you fishers of men.”

Then he turns and walks towards us. Can you see him? He approaches and gestures us toward him. He sits down on a sand dune and speaks to us. “You too must follow me. You too must be my disciples. Go and make my word known. Feed the poor. Care for the children. Heal the sick. Visit the Prisoner. Be my presence in their midst. Be my church and guide my people. Build my Kingdom in your own place. Amid your own families. Pray to my Father and yours. Make it a holy and safe place, that my name may be known and respected. Do this and you will build that better world and my Father who see all these things will reward you.”

Are we looking for a reward? Yes we are. Do we want to grow this church? Yes we do. Do we desire to make this parish financially independent? Of course we do. Do we desire to reach out to the whole of Pike County? Absolutely.

We can only do that when we truly believe that we are the Body of Christ, we are the Kingdom of heaven. We are the Gospel in this place. Because the day we do the Child Care is not our Child Care, it is Christ’s Child Care, the coffee hour is Christ’s fellowship and the pledge drive is our contribution to Christ’s Gospel.

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When we realize that, we let go of worry and allow the Holy Spirit to take control of our life. And our prayer must be: "Come Holy Spirit fill our life with your Grace."

Amen+

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