

6 Epiphany
February 15, 2009
Fr. Bill McGinty

“Choose to have an Epiphany!”

If you read you will notice, that from time to time writers talk about epiphany. They don't necessarily use the word in the religious sense. When they say they or someone else had an 'epiphany' they normally mean a moment of disclosure, an insight, a flash of inspiration or a creative moment, when what they should do becomes clear.

You could have an epiphany about all sorts of things from deciding to have a baby, to realizing you are in love, to hitting on an idea that starts a business that makes you a fortune or simply deciding in mid-life to change career.

Christopher Columbus had an epiphany contemplating Copernicus' theory that the world was round and rotated around the sun. Subsequently, sailing west would eventually take him to the East Indies.

Ignatius of Loyola a Spanish soldier from a rich family had an epiphany lying in a hospital bed recovering from a battle injury. It would lead him to found a religious order that he called the Society of Jesus and we know as the Jesuits.

In this religious sense epiphanies come to us all the time. More often they come at times we least expect them and often in a setting that is far removed from a church, a place of worship or somewhere we would regard as being 'holy'.

Many of you who decided to come and make this your church did so because you had an epiphany. You had an experience, a feeling, an insight that this was a good place for you.

Perhaps, that is as far as you took the thought. Maybe you didn't pause to think further or to develop it. It may well be that the feeling of belonging was enough for you at the time.

But what if there is something else? Have you ever had that feeling that there is something you ought to do, but you just can't put your finger on it? It is like a word or name on the tip of your tongue. An itch you want to scratch, but can't. It makes you shift restlessly in your seat and you feel frustrated and unhappy because whatever it is, it just hasn't come to you yet.

When I hear people expressing this feeling I always know that God is talking to them. It is as if the Holy Spirit is knocking on the window of their soul. I tell them maybe you had that feeling of wanting to be here for a totally different reason than liking the stonework, loving the beauty of the wood or the pews and the stained glass windows. Perhaps they were just the way God got your attention, like the bird of paradise attracting a mate. Maybe God has brought you here for a totally different reason and he is still talking to you.

There are three realizations or epiphanies in today's readings. Naaman the Aramean seeks out Elisha the Prophet, to be cured from his terrible leprosy. Paul writing to the Corinthians tells them that to reach the Kingdom of God they must stay the course. And in the Gospel even the poor leper becomes aware that after encountering Christ your life cannot remain the same.

Protestants, or rather Evangelical Christians have a habit of asking people they meet: “Have you met Jesus?”

They do so quite deliberately and what they are asking is pretty specific. They are asking you: “Has Jesus come into your life? Have you encountered him? Has he invited you to a personal relationship with him and have you responded ‘yes’ and now my life can never be the same.”

Because, if the answer to that question is ‘yes’, then all your problems have disappeared and the Gospel and the Kingdom of Jesus spoke about is taking effect in other people’s lives because of you.

A Californian flew into London and stayed with some old friends. He had read and heard about the very famous Oxford University so asked to go there. His friend took him to the town of Oxford and gave him the grand tour.

“That is Keble College,” his friend pointed out, “over there beyond the bridge is Magdalene, to the south is King’s college and behind is Queens. Over there is Bennett and Jesus college, Christ college and Campion and Elizabeth college.”

His California friend looked puzzled and asked: “That’s all very well, but which one of them is Oxford University?”

They are of course all Oxford University. The epiphany that is church works in much the same way. It may well be the windows, the Cobblestone or the woodwork that attracted us here and made us feel at home. Yet the real essence of church is ‘Jesus’ and our encounter with him. Everything else plays into that. If our choosing this church has been an Epiphany it is because Christ is issuing us an invitation to encounter him at a deeper level and to participate in that which makes us uneasy, scratch and feel frustrated till we know for certain what it is and how we can go about achieving it.

We know that we didn’t come to be entertained. Other churches are bigger, with mass choirs and millions in endowments. So why did Christ invite me here? What is it he wants me to do? Perhaps, just perhaps my contributions to this church and this ministry mean more because there are fewer of us and I know that I am needed. Perhaps here I am free to serve, to reach the prisoner at a moment in her life where she needs the words of Jesus to penetrate her soul and give her a chance at redemption. Here my voice is needed, my talents can shine and I can worship.

You and I know that epiphany happens to us. It happens every time we say to ourselves: “Forget about what I want in this situation what does Jesus want? Where in this house of Christ, where in this house of salvation can God use me?”

If you have asked yourself that question and God has given you the answer albeit, open a Montessori school or put a new roof on this old church my answer to you this morning is “go for it.” If you have had an epiphany that God has brought you here, to build a Peace Program, an Ecumenical Program among the churches or become involved with Kevin Stroyan’s Anti-drug Program or Dave Penning’s Holocaust Education Program; then that is true epiphany and you should go for it.

For everything else you should talk to Penny Luhrs or Lois Yanick. Penny will teach you about stewardship, tell you precisely why it costs \$150,000 to continue Christ’s’ work in this place and put you to work fundraising to make up the difference. Lois can send you to prison, or make you feel like Jesus,

healing that poor leper by sending you to visit a shut-in, and bringing Jesus to them. She may ask you to work with Safe Haven, fill a gap for Shine Jesus Shine, she may put you to work in the Food Pantry where you will hear stories of hardship at first hand. She may ask you to help with Pike County Aids Day or another event of the same nature. You may decide that children and the Child Care is something that you can improve. If maintenance is your forte, then you might want to relieve John Yanick of any one of the following jobs he has on his clipboard list: mending the leaking pipe in the Child Care; finishing the handicap bathroom, painting the offices, re-varnishing two office doors, weather stripping the church doors replacing the kitchen countertops; putting a grill in the basement door; repainting bathroom stalls; putting wheels on Child Care cabinets; putting away the crèche; removing the old Child Care bathtub sealing the attic from bats.

That is just John's list. Penny Luhrs has her own. There is not a day, not a week, when that encounter with Jesus does not happen in this church. Involve yourself with any ministry, answer Christ's invitation and you will find yourself meeting Christ in so many people's problems and cries for help. For Christ, your Christ, will place you in situations where he would wish you to be.

In Ireland on the coast of Donegal stands a small white church. I fished the lake next to that church all day every day for the entire summer of 1987. Cars passed on the road no one ever stopped. The doors were never open and no one ever came or went from that church building. After a while I began to wonder why there was even a church there at all.

You and I know that the real church is merely a group of people called together by Jesus. At first we may not know why we have been called or even why we are here. But God has a way of revealing what he wants of us and what his purpose is. We listen for his agenda. Like Naaman we are prepared to do what ever he asks of us.

Jesus invitation has a way of cleansing and transforming us. Like the leper the body of Christ takes on new flesh. It is this transforming power we see when the Holy Spirit begins to work in our lives. That work begins, when we say: "Yes, to Christ and allow Epiphany to begin."

Amen+