

The Epiphany of the Lord (C)

January 6, 2013

Epiphany celebrates the birth of Jesus over two thousand years ago, but we also celebrate it as calling us to recognize God's ongoing manifestation in our world and in our lives as Emmanuel, God-with-us. However, in light of recent tragedies, some might be tempted to question this assertion: "Really? God with whom? Where was God-with-us in the Philippine typhoon? Where was God-with-us in Hurricane Sandy? Where was God-with-us in the Newtown school massacre?

Why such events happen cannot be answered by any person with assured authority. Giving consideration to what we human beings are doing to contribute to global warming and the fact that there is the idea of human sinfulness would seem to reflect a willingness to look to our own responsibility for what is occurring in our world.

I don't think God needs an attorney, but can we reconcile a God who loved the world so much that he sent his only Son for our salvation? If the Christmas season proclaims anything, it is that God is irrevocably for us, hence the name Emmanuel, which translates as God-with-us, even now, in our pain and confusion. And that God is at work with us in the generosity of people doing all they can to bring comfort and aid in various forms, directly and indirectly.

Today's Gospel story reminds us that God is a God of the journey, sending people forth to discover new life, and that God accompanies them on the journey. This has been so from the beginning of God's dealings with humankind. God chose a man called Abram and told him: "Go forth from the land of your kinsfolk and from your father's house to a land that I will show you." And God went with Abram. And most of all, God was with Moses and the people as they set out from their land of slavery to find a place where they could live and prosper.

The story of the Magi witnesses again to God's getting people to set off in a direction leading deeper into the mystery of God and a deeper sharing in communion with God. In the end it is a story of discovery of who God is and how God helps us arrive at the place where we finally find God.

Matthew's astrologers got to the right place by being attentive to the world around them. The lesson to be learned might be that God is with us, reaching out through the occurrences of our lives, the events that befall us, the joys and sorrows we experience. Natural disasters and violence can make this hard to believe, especially in the face of such grief. But it is the story of Epiphany that reminds us of something to be spoken in the face of any and all suffering, whether on a personal scale or a cosmic one. God will not let suffering and death have the final word.

The Epiphany tells us God in Christ has come to scatter the darkness. The light God has set before us in Christ is one that comes from a vision given by faith. This vision allows us to continue to "rise up in splendor," even in the darkest hours, and to reflect on the light that has shone on us, the glory of the Lord that is the grace of Jesus Christ within us.

We often lose sight of that light. Indeed, we often are the cause of deep darkness, but not always. As horrible as these tragedies have been for all those whom it touched, the response of people around the world has been its own sign of hope. Once more we have recognized that we are bound together by a common humanity. While we continue to walk, often through our own darkness in both our personal and communal lives, we can bring light to places where people have been overwhelmed by the tragedies and sorrows of life.

The journey of the Magi is one we take every week when we journey here to Mass. Like the Magi, who arrived in Jerusalem where the words of the prophets were consulted, we come here to hear the words of prophets, apostles, and evangelists. Like the Magi, we finally arrive at the place where the Lord is to be found – in the sacrament of his Body and Blood. And like the Magi, we return home a little more transformed as we continue to grow into being the Body of Christ. And may we walk the path, through the times of darkness and times of light, with hearts of faith, hope, and love for all who are on the road with us.

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