



SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



Abbot Thomas Frerking
Solemnity of the Epiphany
January 6, 2008

Saint Louis Abbey
9:00 a.m. Mass

Introduction

We celebrate today the Solemnity of the Epiphany, the great feast of the first manifestation or shining forth of the divinity of Our Lord Jesus Christ as the true Son of God. To prepare ourselves to celebrate the Mass, let us consider how lively our faith in the divinity of the Lord has been, and how fully we have lived in accordance with that faith.

Homily

“My brothers and sisters, the glory of the Lord Jesus has been made manifest and will continue to be revealed in our midst until he comes again.”

These opening words of the Epiphany Proclamation, which we have just heard sung, declare the meaning of today’s great feast.

First, “the glory of the Lord Jesus has been made manifest.” In Greek, ‘epiphany’ means a manifesting or shining out. The feast of the Epiphany celebrates the first manifestation or shining out of the glory of the Lord Jesus, that is, of his divinity as the true Son of God. This first shining out of his divine glory is threefold. The first shining out of his glory at the beginning of his earthly life was on the day of the visit of the Magi, when the Child and his Mother, and all who surrounded them, were illuminated by the brilliant and glorious light of the miraculous star. The first shining out of his glory at the beginning of his public life, on this same day thirty years later, was at his Baptism, when the Holy Spirit descends upon him and the voice of the Father declares: “This is my Son, in whom I am well pleased.” The first shining out of his glory at the beginning of his preaching and miracles, on this same day a year after his Baptism, was at his first miracle, when he turns the water into wine at the wedding feast in Cana, and allows his glory to be seen. The shinings out continue throughout his life in this world, culminating in the manifestation of his glory at his Passion, Death, Resurrection, Ascension to the right hand of the Father and sending of the Holy Spirit. At each of these shinings out, those who see his divine glory come to him and believe in him. But all these shinings out of the Lord, and their drawing disciples to him, are contained as it were in seed in the threefold first shining out of the Epiphany. And, remarkably, at the first shining out while he is still a Child those who come to him are not Jews, but Gentiles: the Magi are “from the East”. Here, then, is the manifestation both of the divinity of the Lord and of the intention of the Father that his Gospel and his salvation are to be for all men and women, Jew and Gentile alike, “unto the ends of the earth.” For this reason, the liturgy of the Roman rite meditates especially on the visit of the Magi on this great feast.



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But then, the second meaning of the Epiphany, for the Epiphany Proclamation declares, “The glory of the Lord Jesus has been made manifest *and will continue to be revealed in our midst until he comes again.*” How will the Lord’s divine glory continue to be revealed in our midst until he comes again? That glory will continue to be revealed in our midst because it will continue to be revealed in the Church, of which we are the members, and which will continue until the Lord comes again. For the Church, it is our Catholic faith, is in a very real sense the continuation of the Incarnation of the Son of God in this age of the Church, between the Lord’s Ascension and his coming again in glory at the end of time. For the Church is the very Body of Christ: he is the Head, we are the members, the whole is vivified by His Holy Spirit. Despite all her very human failings, and yes, sins, the glory of the Lord, yes, of his divinity, continues to shine out in the Church, in her oneness, her holiness, her catholicity, her apostolicity, and will continue to do so until the Lord comes again. The glory shines out not least when the Church is assembled as her truest self, as the Eucharistic community, and this is why the Epiphany Proclamation goes on to proclaim the coming great feasts of the liturgical year: each a shining forth of the Lord’s glory. And this shining forth of the Lord’s glory continues to draw men and women to faith.

But here, dear friends, in this last statement, we have not only a statement of present truth, present fact, but also a statement which is a most serious call to each one of us who together are the Lord’s Church. The call is that we must, by the Lord’s grace, live in such a way that through us the glory of the Lord can shine out to the men and women, to the world, of our time, and to all men and women – for that first shining of the Lord, to the Magi, revealed that his gospel was not only for the Jews, but for the Gentiles, for all men and women of all times. We cannot prevent this light from shining, for it is from God, but, if we do not live faithfully, we can impede its shining, and if we live well, we can become very transparent to its shining. How, then, are we to live if the light of the Lord is to shine out in our world? To a world too sorrowful and weak to rise above saying, “All is relative”, we must witness to the existence of objective truth and objective moral values. To a world too sorrowful and weak to resist the temptation to destroy human life both at its beginning and at its end, we must witness that human life is inviolable from natural conception to natural death. To a world too sorrowful and weak to believe to have faith that men and women can make a lifelong dedication of themselves in the covenant of marriage, a communion of fruitful love, we must witness that such dedication by the Lord’s grace is possible, and that the family remains the fundamental unit of human society. To a world too sorrowful and weak to be able to overcome every form of discrimination and hatred, we must witness to the equal dignity of all human beings created in the image of God. To a world too sorrowful and weak to have the energy to work to deliver a billion human beings from grinding poverty, we must witness to the universal destination of human goods, and as Americans must be prepared to make the sacrifices which would make such a witness on our part authentic. To a world too sorrowful and weak to resist the temptation to despair and violence, we must witness to the call to seek and strive after peace, and to work everywhere for justice and solidarity among human beings, the only basis for peace. To a world too sorrowful



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and weak to retain a vivid sense of God, we must witness to the light in such a way that men and women give glory to our Father in heaven.

Dear friends, as with the Feast of the Epiphany we begin to approach the end of the Christmas season and the beginning of Ordinary Time we might do well to consider these matters, or the ones more pertinent to the circumstances of our own life – for we all know what they are – and ask ourselves before the Lord how we might become more transparent to the shining of his light, in our world, in our country, in our community, in our place of work, in our family, in our heart alone before God. The challenges are great. Yet we know how it will all end: we know that the gates of Hell shall not prevail against the Church, we know that the New Jerusalem will descend out of heaven like a Bride prepared for her husband, we know that the Lord will come with his recompense before him, with vindication in his hand. By the Lord's mercy, we are not without hope and without God in the world, but the Lord has been given to us, and the hope which he brings. To Jesus Christ, who is, who was, and who is to come, be highest praise, now and forever. Amen.