

Third Sunday after Epiphany

January 27, 2008

Lessons: Psalm 27:1, 4-9; Isaiah 9:1-4; 1 Corinthians 1:10-18; Matthew 4:12-23

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, THE SON AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

Today is the Third Sunday after Epiphany. Next Sunday will be the fourth and final Sunday of this, the third season of the church year. In only one and one half weeks we will be at Ash Wednesday and the beginning of the season of Lent.

But today, before we begin to think about Lent, let's consider again the lessons that we have been reading and the introduction to this season of Epiphany that we heard from Fr. Bob. Let's allow these weeks, this season of Epiphany, to touch us, to teach us.

In our Gospel lesson three weeks ago we read of Jesus' Baptism and how he received the Holy Spirit at the beginning of his public ministry. Last week we reflected again on our own Baptism and said again the words in The Renewal of Baptismal Vows. And we reflected on their importance to our lives, to our lives as Christians. So let me ask you a question. When you were Baptized, or when you were Confirmed as an adult, did you have any reservations? Any hesitation? Think about your Baptism. Try to remember that special day, that special moment. Now listen to these words about Baptism from *The Pilgrim's Regress*. I have changed the words slightly to put you in the story. Try to feel yourself in the story. You and a friend have come to be Baptized or Confirmed, and you hear:

*"It is well," said Mother Kirk. "You have come a long way round to reach this place, [to which] I would have carried you in a few moments. But it is very well."*

*"What must I do?" [you ask].*

*"You must take off your rags," said she, "as your friend has done already, and then you must dive into this water."*

*"Alas," [you say], "I have never learned to dive."*

*"There is nothing to learn" said she. "The art of diving is not to do anything new but simply to cease doing something. You have only to let yourself go."*

*"It is only necessary," said [your friend], with a smile, "to abandon all efforts at self-preservation."*

*"I think," [you say], "that if it is all [the same] I would rather jump."*

*“It is not all [the same],” said Mother Kirk. “If you jump, you will be trying to save yourself and you may be hurt. As well, you would not go deep enough. You must dive so that you can go right down to the bottom of the pool: for you are not to come up again on this side. There is a tunnel in the cliff, far beneath the surface of the water, and it is through that [tunnel] that you must pass so that you may come up on the far side.”*

*“I see,” [you think to yourself], “that they have brought me here to kill me,” but [you] began, nevertheless, to take off [your] clothes. They were little loss to [you], for they hung in shreds, plastered with blood and with the grime of every [county] from Puritania to the canyon: but they were so stuck to [you] that they came away with pain and a little skin came with them. When [you were] naked, Mother Kirk bade [you] come to the edge of the pool, where [your friend] was already standing. It was a long way down to the water, and the reflected moon seemed to look up at [you] from the depth of a mine. [You] had had some thought of throwing [yourself] in, with a run, the very instant [you] reached the edge, before [you] had time to be afraid. And the making of that resolution had seemed to be itself the bitterness of death, so that [you] have believed the worst must be over and that [you] would find [yourself] in the water before [you] knew...*

*“Come on, ” [your friend] said, “the longer we look at it the less we shall like it.” And with that [your friend] took a header into the pool and they saw [your friend] no more. And how [you] managed it or what [you] felt I did not know, but [you] also rubbed [your] hands, shut [your] eyes, despaired, and let [yourself] go. It was not a good dive, but, at least, [you] reached the water head first.”*

Is there any area of our Christian life where we are hesitant? Where we are holding back? Any area where we are not committing ourselves to a head first dive? If so, we may be missing out on an important part of what Jesus is calling us to experience.

The second focus during this season of Epiphany is on what Fr. Bob called “evangelism”. Describing Epiphany he said: *“...it is our ministry, our life, to show or to exhibit Jesus as Savior to the World.”*

Rob O’Neill, Bishop of the Diocese of Colorado, has called us to “Proclamation” and in *The Purpose Driven Life*, Rick Warren reminds us that one of our five “Purposes” is evangelism.

During the last two weeks we have read Gospel stories of Jesus and Andrew inviting others to “Come and See” and we have heard Jesus invite two sets of brothers to “Follow Me”. Later, in both Matthew and Mark, we will read of Jesus telling his followers to “Go, and make disciples of all the world” and to baptize them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Sharing the love of God with others is important, and inviting others to come and share in that love is something that we are called to do as Christians. And clearly it is important that we respond to this call.

But is it important that we all undertake to respond to this call to proclamation, to evangelism, in exactly the same way? Absolutely not!! We are each an individual. We were created that way. We feel and think and speak and experience life differently. And that is very exciting. That also means that we will each share the hope and love and joy of Jesus Christ differently. We need to be the individual that God created us to be.

Listen to these words of C. S. Lewis. He wrote:

*“You can’t lay down any pattern for God. There are many different ways of bringing people into His Kingdom, even some ways that I specially dislike! I have therefore learned to be cautious in my judgment.”*

When asked how he might actually do it, Lewis suggested two ways. He wrote:

*“This may be either emotional or intellectual. If I speak only of the intellectual kind, that is not because I undervalue the other but because, not having been given the gifts necessary for carrying it out, I cannot give advice about it.”* Think about that: *“...not having been given the gifts necessary for carrying it out...”*

It is encouraging that someone with all of the intellect and talent that C. S. Lewis had, that he was also very willing to acknowledge that there were forms of Proclamation or Evangelism that he did not like to use. It is encouraging, because neither do we.

But are there some basic things, some basic guidelines that we might want to keep in mind? Scottish New Testament Professor William Barclay suggests that there are. After reminding us that Peter and Andrew and James and John were fisherman, and after reminding us that Jesus had invited them to become “fishers of men”, Professor Barclay offered these thoughts that apply equally to fishing and Proclamation or Evangelism.

First, we must have patience. We must wait until there is interest. Rarely will we see quick results. We must learn to wait.

Second, we must have perseverance. We must learn never to be discouraged, but always to try again. We must always be willing to try again.

Third, we must have courage. We must be willing to try.

Forth, we must have an eye for the right moment. The wise fisherman knows well that there are times when it is hopeless to fish. He knows when to cast and when not to cast. And so must we.

And fifth, we must remember that the same approach will not work with all people. We must remember to approach people as they would like to be approached.

Obviously I like the analogy to fishing, and if we will keep Professor Barclay's suggestions in mind I think they will be helpful as we seek to Proclaim, to Evangelize and help others to come to know Christ.

So, during these remaining two weeks of Epiphany, let's continue to focus on these two important aspects of our Christian life.

First, let's think about our Baptisms, or our Confirmations, and remember the commitments that we have made. Then let us look carefully, and try to discover any area where we may experience a hesitation to really let ourselves go, a hesitation to dive head first into the waters of our Christian life. And if we find any area of hesitation, let us acknowledge it and offer it to God in prayer.

And second, let's also remember our call to Proclaim, to Evangelize, to share with others, in word and in action, the Good News of Jesus Christ. And then, as we continue to offer ourselves as "Instruments of Peace", let's look for opportunities to invite others to "Come and See".

AMEN