

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Jan 8th 2016

In this brief post Epiphany time, which concludes the Christmas season, the Church is eager to have us meditate on the ways that God has disclosed the Divine Self (and the Divine Intention for salvation) within the human condition. The Epiphany Feast and subsequent Sundays stress this theme in the lectionary for all three years, as do the daily readings in these final days of the Christmas cycle that ends with the extraordinary disclosure of Jesus' meaning and mission in the Baptismal accounts of all four Gospels.

Today, the Church relies on a wonderful summary text from the first letter of John to invite us to consider the ultimate implication for God's plan from all eternity – to reunite humans to the Divine Self for eternal life. The “agency” for this unification is the water and blood of Jesus – testified to by the Divine Spirit. Water and blood in Johanne writings generally refer to humanity and divinity (wine is sometimes used for blood). The Church has interpreted this to mean the original humanity and divinity of Jesus which he shares with us through his death and resurrection. The Gospel of John speaks of the “outpouring” of water and blood from Jesus' side in his passage through death to resurrection. This outpouring is upon the Church (made present in Mary and the Beloved Disciple) who then continues the effect of transformation of our broken humanity to the fullness of “humanity-united-to-its-divine-source” through the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist. In these two agents, water and blood, Jesus enacts his purpose, the union of divinity and humanity through his personhood. All of humanity is offered the invitation to be restored to the Divine nature of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit and Jesus accomplish this task by their work together. Those who claim the truth of Jesus' mission and participate in it are brought to union with him and in him to the Father. Through water and blood Jesus' humanity and divinity are disclosed and become effective for us.

The Epiphany feast, as part of the Christmas season, further invites us to consider how it is specifically through our humanity that we are drawn into the divine life of God. We do not become saved by trying to be “super” human or less than human. Pope Francis, in his Christmas remarks to the Roman Curia in the Year of Mercy, invited his co-workers and all of us, to laugh more heartily and to weep in great sorrow and sympathy in order to be more human. The more authentically human we become the more authentically we disclose God's plan to perfect our humanity by restoring its essential life in God.

As humans we are limited and dependent, however. Embracing our limitedness, the fact that we have to depend upon God and other humans for most of the things that we need makes us more fully human. When we acknowledge dependence we also become grateful. Gratitude is the human response to divine mercy that effects the integration of water and blood that is divine life with our human life. The essence of both sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist is gratitude for God's mercy.

Since this is symbol (or sacrament) talk it may seem like theological gobbledygook. Here is a way to think symbolically so this makes sense. Take a few minutes and quiet yourself. Remind yourself of the last time you drank a cold glass of water when you were really thirsty. Feel the cool water fill your parched mouth and slide down your throat. Consider how alive this makes you feel.

Or, if this is not your experience, think of sliding into a pool (or ocean or river) of clean water on a hot day, consider the feelings of well-being, relaxation and peace.

Another focus could be your own pulse. Quiet down and feel the pulse in your wrist or neck. Think how blessed you are that you have a healthy blood flow as your heart pumps blood to your brain and extremities to bring you life, health and energy.

As we consider any of the “natural” gifts, consider how reduced your life is when your blood flow is not healthy or when clean, cold water is not available to quench your thirst or bring your body to health.

Both water and blood are symbols of life. They do not substitute for each other, but together they can signify the fullness of what it means to be alive. Thus water and blood in Jesus open us to grasp the gift of the fullness of his divinity in his humanity – that life he wishes to share with us. That is the story behind the story of Christmas that is disclosed in Epiphany. Let us pray that the mercy of God, disclosed in his plan for us will arouse gratitude. That God’s mercy will trigger in us the power to receive the gift God wishes to give of His own divine life within our humanness as water, our humanity, is transformed by God’s grace and our receptive gratitude into Divine Life within us.

“By the mystery of this water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity.” (from the prayers at the preparation of the gifts in the Eucharist)

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