

Epiphany of the Lord
January 6, 2019
“Unity with Diversity”

Is 60:1-6
Eph 3:2...6
Mt 2:1-12

My Brothers and Sisters in the Lord –

It is truly tragic that racism still exists in America and throughout the world. No matter what color our skin is, there is always someone who judges us by the way we look and not according to the way we are.

The best of us might think that we are above racism. However, in certain dangerous situations, we will think ourselves worse off when confronted by someone of a particular race. Racism has fear at its roots. We fear what we don't know. We fear what we don't understand. We fear losing our security – the power, the control, the wealth we might possess – to another ethnic group, social class, or even religious membership. Furthermore, we tend to judge everyone of the other group by the actions of the extremists and the worst among them. Yet, no matter who we are, our race or group has members who are just as radical and extreme!

However, God did not create us for division and strife. God created us diverse for what we can contribute to one another. And the readings for today give us much to think about along these lines.

The last chapters of Isaiah were written for the Chosen People who had returned from Babylon to the Promised Land. Not long after their restoration, they began to fail before God. There was only so much land available – So there was wrangling and fighting over the land – as well as over who should be admitted to the Temple – and over foreigners who wanted to live there.

Consequently, Isaiah tried to give them a new perspective. He spoke of a new and future Jerusalem that would be the dwelling place of the Great King. People of every nation would stream to that place. Great riches would be brought to honor that king and sustain the kingdom with its people. However, it would be in the future – but it would be everlasting when it finally occurred!

St. Matthew uses this prophecy in the story of the Magi. The Magi were not Jews – they were not part of the Chosen People. But they were open to God and to God's unfathomable ways. Somehow, they recognized and understood what everyone else did not. They seemed to know more about prophecy than the Jewish religious leaders themselves. When they arrived in Jerusalem, they must have been surprised to learn that they were the only ones who knew what they knew.

But they persisted. They had risked everything to follow an unusual star. They had even brought their prized possessions to honor the newborn king. And they laid them before a poor child, of poor parents of another nationality – before a child who was the Lord of the universe in disguise! The Magi truly had great faith and commitment!

At his birth, Jesus was manifested, first of all, to the shepherds, who were considered to be the lowest of the low. They were despised by everyone. They were not even allowed into the Temple. They were considered beyond salvation. The Magi were foreigners, who, it was believed, were likewise beyond God's care or concern. Yet, like the shepherds, they discovered what the others could not!

Today, St. Paul teaches us that there is no race, group, or class that is beyond God's embrace and the salvation that Jesus brings! Nevertheless, so many in our society and throughout the world resist this truth and remain racist, bigoted, and prejudiced!

So, what is asked of us? What can we do to eliminate this scourge which divides and threatens our God-desired unity?

Without any doubt, we should look deeply into ourselves. What are our hidden prejudices? What are our biases? Why do we fear or look with suspicion upon people of other races, groups, classes, or world religions? Are we responding to stereotypes and falsehoods? How much do we unknowingly carry forward from our parents, grandparents, and national background?

Moreover, what are we going to do about what we discover? What are we willing to risk? What are we willing to sacrifice? Are we willing to speak up? Are we willing to confront others in their exclusiveness, opinions, and attitudes? Are we willing to remain calm and turn the other cheek when we are victims ourselves of the racism, biases, prejudices, and misinformation of others?

Brothers and Sisters, Jesus came for everyone. Moreover, Jesus reveals that we are all brothers and sisters – truly God's children – in the marvelous diversity of the human race. Jesus is the Unifying Principle of all that God has made and everyone whom God has created. He is God-Man – He is human and divine – He is brother to us all. And his Eucharist is the sacrament that makes us all one!

So let us pray on this Epiphany – this day of Manifestation of Jesus to the world – that our world can become one, just as Jesus and the Father are one – and one with each of us!

Amen.

January 6, 2019

Msgr. Russell G. Terra