

## Epiphany

I take as my text today a portion of the passage from St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians:

"...that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power."

"Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable unto Thee, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer."

When we read the first chapter of St. John's Gospel, especially the first 14 verses, we are struck with an emphatic truth concerning our Lord — Jesus Christ is the Light of the world.

The passage itself is one of the most inspiring in the New Testament, joining together the Creation of all the world, the universe itself, with the Manifestation of Christ the Messiah to the world.

Jesus Christ is the Light: He lights up mankind, the world, and all that is within it. Without that Light, we are in darkness, without hope, without life.

Coming into the world, Jesus Christ brings us light, light that reflects His Holiness and guides us into the way of light, into that Holiness.

Today, we are celebrating the coming of that Light into the world, the Feast of the Epiphany, the Manifestation of our Lord, of Light, to the world.

When we hear the word "Epiphany," especially, at this time of the year, our first thought is most likely that of the visit of the wise men, the Magi, from the east to pay homage to the baby Jesus.

The Gospel passage from St. Matthew vividly recounts the manifestation of our Lord to the wise men; while, in his Epistle passage to the Ephesians, St. Paul soberly points out its full meaning.

Truly, this is a festive time in the Church. We have witnessed on Christmas Day to the Incarnation of the Son of God, God coming into the world by taking upon Himself our humanity. Now, on the Feast of the Epiphany, we witness to His Manifestation to the Gentiles.

Perhaps, in our joy, we overlook how momentous this revelation is; most assuredly, Paul has not, for he explains in his Letter to the Ephesians that this is the revelation of the eternal purpose of God.

For centuries, the Jews as God's Chosen People had nothing but contempt for the Gentiles, for any people other than themselves. They considered anyone who wasn't a Jew to be worthless in the sight of God.

The Apostles themselves, even though they had been witnesses to the Saviour of the World, were slow to comprehend the fullness of His Incarnation.

It was Paul who made the discovery that salvation was not for the Jews alone; that Jesus had come into the world for the salvation of all mankind; the gathering together of all people. This was the eternal purpose of God.

It fell upon Paul to reveal to the Church what had been revealed to him; indeed, it might be said that without Paul it is conceivable that Christianity would not have spread throughout the world and we would not be Christians today.

Having convinced the Church that God's purpose through Christ was to bring all of mankind into love, Paul fully embraced his mission to the Gentiles. The inclusion of the Gentiles was not an afterthought of God; salvation was not first offered to the Jews and then, when refused, extended to the Gentiles; rather, it was, is, the eternal purpose of God.

In the ancient world, who would have ever imagined that God's privileges were for all people. Even today, men fail to see the truth of Paul's revelation.

When Paul was writing this letter to the Ephesians, he was a prisoner in Rome. Though he was allowed to remain in house-arrest, he was chained to the wrist of a Roman soldier to prevent his escape.

But Paul looked upon this imprisonment in a different light. He considered himself first and foremost a prisoner of Christ and lastly a prisoner of Rome. For him, it was a privilege to suffer or undergo any hardships for his Lord and, thus, he regarded himself not as a victim but as a champion of Christ.

There is something else we can garner from St. Paul: his zeal for spreading the good news, the universality of God's Love, expressed so beautifully by St. John in one of the most quoted verses of the New Testament:

"So God loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son to the end that all who believe in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Even though he was a prisoner at the time of writing this letter to the Ephesians, Paul was undeterred in his commitment to bringing about unity in Christ; Jesus Christ alone is all that is necessary and sufficient for our salvation. For Paul, this was the truth of God's revelation to him on the road to Damascus.

Paul has left us himself as an example of Christian Mission. He calls it a grace given to him by God, and throughout his ministry, despite hardship, material loss, even the threat of death, Paul's endurance never wavered. He remained steadfast.

Paul had discovered the great secret of God; to him had been revealed that the love and mercy and grace of God were for all people, not just for one nation but for all nations. To him had been revealed the Eternal Purpose of God.

Armed with this revelation, this great insight into the mind of God, Paul set out on his mission to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles, to all people, the promise of salvation, bringing all people into the presence of God through his Son Jesus Christ.

Today, as we celebrate the Feast of the Epiphany, we recall the beauty of a moment in time when God revealed Himself to us through the birth of a baby in the most humble of conditions, whose coming into the world brought kings to their knees before Him.

We celebrate the coming into the world the Light which is the Light of mankind.

We also celebrate Paul's great discovery of God's eternal purpose that salvation and eternal life were for all of His Creation, that all people were to be gathered together in His Love; that through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ we could become His heirs to the Heavenly Kingdom by adoption.

Paul's mission has been passed down to us.

As we embrace that wonderful revelation of inclusion by Grace, we can become prisoners of Christ and spread, as St. Paul did, the good news of God's eternal purpose for all mankind.

Prisoners of Christ, chained to our Lord and Saviour by faith, just as St. Paul was chained, as was St. Peter, privileged to endure any hardship for Him, and offering ourselves as instruments of his Love, as instruments of his Peace.

Peace. How wonderful is that Peace which passeth all understanding, lighting our hearts, shining before all men, that it may show forth our good works for all the world to see.