



Breaking Open the Word of Faith

Good News Reflections for the Sundays of January, 2010

by Terry A . Modica



Second Sunday of Christmas

January 2, 2011

Read:

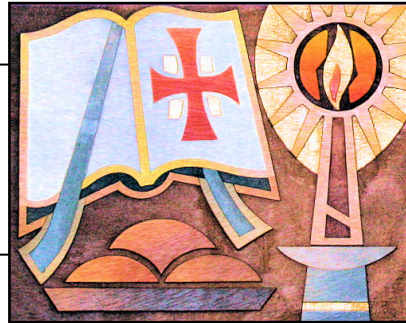
Sirach 24:1-4, 8-12

Ps 147:12-15, 19-20

Ephesians 1:3-6, 15-18

John 1:1-18

(In the U.S., see the next page.)



Reflect:

For the Second Sunday of Christmas, we focus on Jesus as the Word of God. What God speaks, Jesus is. The Father created life by speaking it into existence, and Jesus sacrificed himself to raise life above the destruction of sin and lead us into eternal life.

When you ask God to help you, the Father says "yes" and Jesus is the "yes" who waits with you to guide you into all that the Father wants to give you.

In the Liturgy of the Eucharist, we pray, "Lord I am not worthy to receive you...." And God says, "Receive me", and Jesus is what we receive, and in him we receive all of God.

In Mass, we have the Liturgy of the Word (the scriptures and homily) before the Liturgy of the Eucharist. If we open our hearts to receive Jesus in the Liturgy of the Word, we will have the faith to see much more than a piece of bread and a cup of wine during the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Why? Because it is not the priest who consecrates the bread and wine. Only God can do that. It is actually Jesus himself who speaks the words that come from the priest's mouth. It doesn't matter how holy or sinful the priest is; Jesus provides the miracle of transubstantiation every time.

When Jesus comes to you in the Word, is your heart quickened? Do the scriptures influence your mind and change your life? And when the bread and wine miraculously become the body and blood of Jesus, do you fall onto your knees in awe because you realize that you're in the presence of God Almighty? Do you feel unworthy to receive onto your lips one so holy as Jesus? When you pray, "Lord I am not wor-

thy to receive You...", are you changed by the experience? Do you become more humble? And more joyful? Are you paying attention to what you say?

Finally, are you so moved by your encounter with Jesus in Mass that you leave church so full of Christ that others want to know the Jesus who has gifted you with his presence?

Jesus is the greatest gift we can (and should!) give to the world. After receiving him in the Word and in the Eucharist, we are called and gifted to live in this love and his joy, and to spread it to others. We are heralds of the Good News, and it is indeed awesome news!

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† What word from God are you waiting to hear? What good news do you hope to hear?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† How is Jesus the source of our joy?

† God has spoken to you, and Jesus is being for you the answer. How will you act on faith with this reality, even before you understand it?

Comments/Prayer Requests:

The Epiphany of the Lord

January 2, 2011 (in the US)

Read:

Isaiah 60:1-6
Ps 72:1-2, 7-8, 10-13
Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6
Matthew 2:1-12

Reflect:

On Epiphany, we celebrate the humble adoration of the magi for the Christ child. The magi were Gentiles, and the Greek word "magi" meant oriental scientists. Despite sometimes being translated as "astrologers", their appearance at the manger does not validate astrology

Because they were not Jews, their determination to meet the Jewish savior says much about what the word "epiphany" means. The magi are good examples of believing in the importance of Jesus even without understanding what it would mean to them personally or to the rest of the world.

They worshiped Jesus as a King-Messiah before they knew how he would become king or how his kingship would save the world from evil. As scientific scholars, they had studied religious writings from beyond the scope of their own culture. Then, they acted on faith in response to the Spirit of God who activated them, and it changed their lives.

Only the Spirit of God can move someone to have faith, because faith is a gift of the Holy Spirit (see 1 Corinthians 12). The word "epiphany" means discovery, a revelation that changes our lives. Epiphanies are gifts from God, given because we want them.

We can imagine how the magi felt when they experienced an epiphany in the presence of the Christ child. Although they did not understand how this baby from a poor, ordinary family could become king, they remembered him for the rest of their lives and listened for news from the land of Israel about Jesus. We know that they heard about his crucifixion and learned what his followers were teaching about it, for

they became Christians – their relics have been venerated since very early times.



Questions for Personal Reflection:

† What sign from God, like the star that the magi followed, are you waiting to see?

† What signs is God already showing you? These are evidence that he is working in your life.

† What epiphany – new understanding – is Jesus giving you about what God is doing in your life?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† Why is it impossible to understand everything about the ways that Jesus is the Messiah for you and for all the world?

† God has given you faith to believe in Jesus as the Messiah. How do you act on this faith? And how do these actions evangelize non-believers?

Comments/Prayer Requests:

The Baptism of the Lord

January 9, 2011

Read:

Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7
Ps 29:(11b)1-4,9-10
Acts 10:34-38
Matthew 3:13-17



Reflect:

Matthew 3:13-17 shows us the "initiation rite" that launched Jesus' public ministry. We, too, have experienced this same Baptism: Our first Sacrament of Initiation immersed us into the life of Christ. The other two initiation sacraments – Confirmation and Communion – confirm this holy life and empower us to live it. Thus says the Lord God about you: "Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am pleased, upon whom I have put my Spirit...." (see the reading from Isaiah).

What is this Spirit doing in you that is pleasing to the Father? How is this Spirit serving the Kingdom of God through you? Are you giving this Spirit the freedom to continue Christ's ministry in today's world?

We have all been baptized into the ministry of Christ, but it's the hardships we endure and the passions we feel that initiate us into our own particular areas of ministry. This is why children of chronically or terminally ill parents often grow up to become doctors and nurses, why those who escape from and recover from abuses often become ministers of healing for other victims, and why workers who suffer from unjust employers often start their own businesses and create jobs where the staff is treated the way Christ should be treated.

Whatever we feel passionate about, we have received this energy from the Passion of Christ through the Sacrament of Baptism.

Then, if we celebrate Mass consciously, paying attention to the true meaning of the Eucharist, our calling to ministry is renewed in the Sacrament of Com-

munion, because Christ who is the Eucharist reunites us to his ministry.

Thus, we can change the world, just as Christ did, one day at a time.

For this, you have been chosen by the Father. Think of what you are doing with this calling: Our Father is very pleased with you!

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† What is the Holy Spirit doing in you that is pleasing to the Father?

† What will you do to give this Spirit the freedom to continue Christ's ministry in your world – in your home, your workplace, your parish, your community – wherever you live, work and play?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† Choose one line from Isaiah's scripture and share how this describes your life in Christ. Take turns with everyone sharing on this until all verses have been covered.

Comments/Prayer Requests:

2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

January 16, 2011

Read:

Isaiah 49:3, 5-6

Ps 40:2, 4, 7-10

1 Corinthians 1:1-3

John 1:29-34



Reflect:

In every Mass, we hear the presiding priest say the words of John the Baptist that are quoted in the Gospel message: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." To which we reply: "Lord, I am not worthy ... but say the word and I shall be healed" ("my soul shall be healed").

This healing began at the beginning of Mass in the Penitential Rite because of our sincere attitude of repentance. With this healing, we recognize Jesus as all of his humanity and divinity. With this healing, we leave church ready to be like John the Baptist, testifying by word and by the way we live that "now I have seen that Jesus is the Son of God."

Is Mass that kind of experience for you?

All parts of the Mass contribute to this. Jesus is present in the community as we unite in song. Jesus is present in the Penitential Rite, listening to our sincerity. Jesus is present in the Liturgy of the Word, broken open like bread to nourish our faith, and when the homily is poor or absent, the Holy Spirit preaches to us privately (straying thoughts are often an action of God). And Jesus is present in all the prayers: the ones we offer and those of the clergy.

All of Mass is meant to transform us, prepare us, and send us out from church as witnesses of the true presence of Christ. Like John the Baptist, we can say:

"I did not know him." In other words: "I saw only bread and wine" and "I was sinful and didn't realize the damage I had done" and "I was wounded and did not know how to be healed."

And like John we can add: "Now I have seen and testified that he is the Son of God. The Holy Spirit revealed to me the presence of my Savior in the Eucharist. The Holy Spirit gently exposed my sinfulness and gave me help in overcoming them. The Holy Spirit leads me to the resources that are healing my wounds."

Questions for Personal Reflection:

† What is the experience of Mass like for you?

† If you could you attend Mass daily, would you? If not, why not? If it's a scheduling problem, will you ask Jesus to change your schedule? If it's a priority problem, will you ask the Holy Spirit to increase in you a desire to sit in the true Eucharistic presence of your Savior?

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† Describe a time when you became more aware of Jesus in the Mass.

† Prior to this development, what distracted you from noticing his presence? What changed? Why? How?

Comments/Prayer Requests:

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

January 23, 2011

Read:

Isaiah 8:23--9:3

Ps 27:1, 4, 13-14

1 Corinthians 1:10-13,17

Matthew 4:12-23

Reflect:

In Matthew 4:12-23, we hear of the fulfillment of the prophecy given by Isaiah in the first reading: Because of Jesus Christ, the people you know who are sitting in darkness (making no effort to get out of their sin-induced misery), who are overshadowed by the demons of spiritual death and destruction, whose stubbornness is causing you great anguish, have seen the light that will heal them.

Through your prayers and faithful persistence has been revealed to them. Even as they fight against this truth and hide from him, the great light of Christ cannot be turned off. Soon or eventually this will cause abundant joy and great rejoicing, not only for you, but for those who are being rescued.

Elsewhere (Luke 12:49-50), Jesus expressed his feelings about the people in darkness: "How great is my anguish until it is accomplished!" Thus, he knows your anguish and shares it, but more deeply and fervently. He is doing more than you know, more than you can imagine, to accomplish the victory for which you've been praying. He is doing everything possible – as well as the impossible – to bring it to fulfillment.

Pray that Divine Providence will use the bad consequences of each person's stubborn rebellion to draw them to himself. Pray that God will use others to bring them into his light. Pray that God will work in his own way to dissolve their spiritual rebellion. Pray that after their conversion they will spread the light of Christ powerfully. And pray that their conversion will be deep, definite and permanent.

We don't pray to change God's mind; he's already working to bring the light of Christ to people who are in darkness. We pray to place the people we care

about into his arms, since they're not asking for this themselves.



Questions for Personal Reflection:

† Write a list of people who are living in darkness. Do you trust in the power of Christ's great light and the victory he obtained through his death and resurrection?

† Make a commitment to feel Christ's anguish more keenly; use this pain to energize you into daily prayer on behalf of darkened souls.

Questions for Faith Sharing:

† Name people who are living in darkness. (Keep this confidential within the group.) Get a large candle and scratch their names into it. Light the candle and commit to pray for them as a faith community, in mutual support of one another. Light this candle at all of your community meetings.

Comments/Prayer Requests:

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time

January 30, 2011

Read:
 Zephaniah 2:3;3:12-13
 Ps 146:6-10 (Mt 5:3)
 1 Corinthians 1:26-31
 Matthew 5:1-12a



Reflect:

In the Gospel reading this Sunday, we get a glimpse of our own sainthood. The eight Beatitudes in Matthew 5:1-12 describe the holiness of those who imitate Jesus. The first four deal with our relationship with God; the last four deal with our relationships with others.

How can we call ourselves saints? Remember that you are a saint, as imperfect as you are at this time on your journey, because God has sanctified you through what Jesus did for you on the cross. This means that he has blessed you. And blessed are you because you love as Jesus loves.

Everything that God blesses is made holy! Therefore, any person who lives the lifestyle of the Beatitudes (which is the lifestyle of Jesus) is blessed by God and can rightfully be called a saint: the poor in spirit who recognize that they need God's love, those who mourn and turn to the Holy Spirit for comfort, those who meekly (i.e., without arrogance) stand up for what is right because they love God, and so on down the list of beatitudes. Meditate on each blessing and notice your sainthood AND the challenge to become more saintly by improving how well you imitate Jesus.

The Church canonizes Saints (which we signify with a capital "S") so that we have role models. Even though we've not reached their level of holiness, we belong to the same communion of saints. A saint is anyone who is following Christ toward heaven, with or without a lay-over in purgatory. As we strive to

improve, we can ask the Saints for help and receive their spiritual guidance.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

- † Looking over the list of the Beatitudes, which do you implement best?
- † Which do you need to improve?
- † Which one do you find least desirable? Why? Discuss this with a Christian friend, priest, counselor or spiritual director to figure out how this weakness is really based on a misunderstanding of God's love for you. Then you will be set free to grow in this area of holiness!

Questions for Faith Sharing:

- † How do you avail yourself of help from the Saints?
- † How does this enable you to grow in holiness? Give an example.

Comments/Prayer Requests: