



Bringing Home the Word

The Epiphany of the Lord (B)

January 7, 2024

Do You See What I See?

Sr. Dianne Bergant, CSA

Today's Gospel answers this question quite definitively: No! Not everyone saw the guiding star in the sky. Not even those who, presumably, knew the prophecy found in the reading from Isaiah. That ancient prophet announced to the people of Jerusalem: "Your light has come" (Isaiah 60:1). In fact, he promised them they would be so embraced by that light, they themselves would shine brightly with its radiance. But when the time came, not everyone saw it. Or, having seen it, they did not recognize it.

The people of Jesus' time were not ignorant of these prophecies. They

knew what they meant and to whom they referred. Consequently, when the stargazers who saw the light inquired about it, those to whom they inquired knew where to send them. So what was the problem? Why were those men in Jerusalem not excited about the star? A new king meant a rival king, and those who had power weren't eager to relinquish it.

We know that not everyone in Israel rejected Jesus. Shepherds had already thrilled at this birth. Someone in Bethlehem had opened his stable to this Child and his parents. Now we add the stargazers from another country. It seems the invitation to come to him is extended to all: political and religious leaders, the unsophisticated and marginalized, the established homeowner, the foreigners in our midst. They are all asked: "Did you see what I saw? What do you think of him?" †

***The invitation to come to him
is extended to all:
political and religious leaders,
the unsophisticated,
everyone in our midst.***



Sunday Readings

Isaiah 60:1-6

Arise! Shine, for your light has come, the glory of the LORD has dawned upon you.

Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6

The Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus.

Matthew 2:1-12

They opened their treasures and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

A Word from Pope Francis

The Magi humbled themselves before the unheard-of logic of God. They welcomed the Lord not the way they had imagined him to be, but as he was, small and poor. Their prostration is the sign of those who place their own ideas aside and make room for God. It takes humility to do this.

ANGELUS, JANUARY 6, 2022



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- How open are you to new thinking?
- God's invitation is offered to all. Have you marginalized any group of people?

Beneath the Whitewash

Fr. Ron Rolheiser, OMI

There is a story told in Holland about an old church. For many years, upon entering it, everyone would stop and bow in the direction of a whitewashed wall. Nobody knew exactly why anybody did that, but everyone had been doing it for such a long time that nobody questioned it. It was tradition. It felt right.

One day, the parish decided to renovate the church. They began to strip the paint and whitewash off the old walls. They discovered traces of a painting on the wall that everyone bowed to. They gently peeled off the whitewash so as not to damage what was beneath it. Slowly, a very beautiful, centuries-old painting of Christ emerged. Nobody alive was old enough to have actually seen it before. It had been hidden for at least a century. Yet everyone had been bowing to it, not knowing why, but sensing that there was a good reason for the reverence.



There is a Christmas lesson in that. Western culture still bows toward the crib of Bethlehem. Like the people in that church in Holland, many are unclear why we are doing what we are doing. There is not much conscious faith left in secular Christmas celebrations, just a habitual response to a tradition.

But—as the story of the recovered painting can teach us—that’s not all bad. It’s better than not bowing to the wall at all. At least we still have the sense that there is something special beneath the whitewash. If we are among the ones who know that there is a painting of Christ behind the whitewash, our response should not be one of cynicism. Our task is not to stop the bowing or the celebration. Our task is to help peel off the whitewash, to help restore the painting beneath it, and to tell the story of who did the painting and why.

The best way to help our culture to celebrate Christmas properly is not by criticizing how it celebrates, but by celebrating in a better way. Let our joy exceed that of the commercial world! Let our bow be deeper and more aware of the marvelous gift that’s behind the whitewash: the gift of the Incarnation of our God! †

From *Daybreaks: Daily Reflections for Advent and Christmas* by Fr. Ron Rolheiser, OMI, available at Liguori.org. *Daybreaks* authors include Fr. Daniel Horan, Sr. Dianne Bergant, and John Shea.

Wisdom from Catholic UPDATE

From “Commit Fully” by Patricia Livingston

When my granddaughter was four, she wasn’t completely over the flu when her preschool Christmas pageant came around. Though no longer contagious, she was still pretty weak. “I have to go,” she said. “They need me. I’m the star.” I assumed she meant she had the lead role. But later, I discovered she was literally the star that led the Wise Men to Bethlehem. Sick or well, we each have a part to play in the pageant of life. All parts make a difference. We have to go. The world needs us. We shine to light the path to God. †

Catholic Update—a subscription newsletter published eleven times a year—explores Church teaching and tradition on contemporary topics. Liguori.org • 800-325-9526

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, so that all believers
may dwell in the light,
walk in the light, and
be witnesses to the light,
we pray—Be born in us,
be born in our world.

The Redemptorists

WEEKDAY READINGS

January 8–13

Monday, Baptism of the Lord:
Is 55:1–11 or 1 Jn 5:1–9 / Mk 1:7–11


Tuesday, Weekday:
1 Sm 1:9–20 / Mk 1:21–28

Wednesday, Weekday:
1 Sm 3:1–10, 19–20 / Mk 1:29–39

Thursday, Weekday:
1 Sm 4:1–11 / Mk 1:40–45

Friday, Weekday:
1 Sm 8:4–7, 10–22a / Mk 2:1–12

Saturday, Weekday:
1 Sm 9:1–4, 17–19; 10:1a / Mk 2:13–17

Bringing Home
the Word 
January 7, 2024

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Bringing Home the Word

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)

January 14, 2024

You Called?

Sr. Dianne Bergant, CSA

Today we focus on our call from God. Both Samuel and Jesus' disciples were called. Unfortunately, not everyone realizes he or she has been called to be a disciple. Pope Francis insists that by virtue of baptism we are all missionary disciples. What does this mean? What does it ask of us?

Today's readings set the stage for our consideration of discipleship. They tell us several things. As with Samuel, the invitation from God can be unexpected, for it can occur in the very ordinary events of life. Perhaps, like Samuel, we don't hear the call because the event is so ordinary. Maybe we need someone to open our eyes to God's presence in

the ordinariness of life. But what do we expect a call from God to be? A thunderclap? A blinding light? Actually, when we realize we have been called by God, it is like a crash of thunder or a blinding light.

Intrigued by Jesus, the disciples wanted to hear more, and so they followed him. Frequently God speaks to us through the lives of other people. When we see goodness in them, we too want to be good, to do good. This might prompt us to share what we have, to comfort those who suffer, to forgive those who have offended us. We may not yet know how to do it, but such goodness can touch us deeply. Do we listen, like Samuel? Are we open, like the disciples? †

A Word from Pope Francis

[There] are different ways of realizing God's design, the one he has for each of us that is always a design of love. God always calls. And the greatest joy for every believer is to respond to this call, offering one's entire being to the service of God and our brothers and sisters.

ANGELUS, ROME, JANUARY 17, 2021



Sunday Readings

1 Samuel 3:3b–10, 19

So [Eli] said to Samuel, "Go to sleep, and if you are called, reply, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'"

1 Corinthians 6:13c–15a, 17–20

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the holy Spirit within you?

John 1:35–42

[Jesus said,] "You are Simon the son of John; you will be called Cephas (which is translated Peter)."

*Maybe we need someone
to open our eyes
to God's presence
in the ordinariness of life.*



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS REFLECTION

- In what ordinary events might you be missing God's voice?
- Are you open to God's call even if it invites you to leave what you know best?

Seeking the Truth in the Digital Age

Michael Brehl, CSsR

God's most important communication with humanity is Jesus Christ. In and through him, the Holy Trinity is revealed—God's very self. This Word is living, active, and present among us.

The New Testament developed from the oral tradition of early Christian communities. Founded on the life and preaching of Jesus, the written Word was received by the community after years of listening. At that time, most people couldn't read or write. A few could conserve copies of the written word.

This changed dramatically with the development of the printing press. Ordinary people could then own books, including the Bible. Today information can be shared almost simultaneously.



Words now are on paper and computers, phones, and tablets. This new world of universal access has obvious advantages. But some material on the internet is

suspect, at best. Even so, some readers continue to think that if information has been published, it must be true.

When reading online, especially spiritual works, I suggest:

- Read with a critical eye. Let common sense and your own experiences guide whether you should check something.
- Talk with others about what you're reading. In community, the written word helps us discern the will of God.
- Does the content stir you to greater love, patience, and tolerance? Does it call you to personal conversion and change? Does it motivate actions on behalf of the abandoned and the poor? Does it judge others?
- Does it lead you to more profound relationships, or does it contribute to loneliness and isolation?

It's important to measure the content of our communication in the light of the gospel and the message of Jesus Christ. †

From "It Still Begins with the Word,"
Liguori, March 2013



*Creator God, open our minds
to recognize your call and
our hearts to embrace loving
service to your people.*

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

The Redemptorists

Wisdom from Catholic UPDATE

From "Beyond My Parish" by Richard W. Thompson

To some people the Catholic Church seems "small"—irrelevant to their concerns, unimportant in their lives, disconnected from the "real" world. Catholics can be very parochial. For many, their idea of the Catholic Church is their parish or the school they attended. With such a small idea of the Church, it's no wonder so many feel as if they "outgrow" the Church. Many of us don't experience just how literally the Church extends to the whole world. Certainly, the geographical expanse of the Church is impressive as on any given Sunday, Mass is celebrated in every language in nearly every city and village of every country on earth. But also consider the extent to which the Church has entered into deep reflection and dialogue with almost every area of human interest and endeavor: science, medicine, environment, artificial intelligence, space, world peace, and more. †

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WEEKDAY READINGS

January 15–20

Monday, Weekday:

1 Sm 15:16–23 / Mk 2:18–22

Tuesday, Weekday:

1 Sm 16:1–13 / Mk 2:23–28

Wednesday, St. Anthony:

1 Sm 17:32–33, 37, 40–51 / Mk 3:1–6

Thursday, Weekday:

1 Sm 18:6–9; 19:1–7 / Mk 3:7–12

Friday, Weekday:

1 Sm 24:3–21 / Mk 3:13–19

Saturday, Weekday:

2 Sm 1:1–4, 11–12, 19, 23–27 / Mk 3:20–21

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Bringing Home the Word

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)

January 21, 2024

The Fish That Didn't Get Away

Sr. Dianne Bergant, CSA

We have all heard stories about the extraordinary fish that got away. We might even have such a story of our own. Two of today's readings are fish stories, but with a slight twist. They are also "call narratives." Last week we reflected on the call to listen and to follow; this week it is a call to go out to bring God's mercy to others. This is a call to "catch" others, as one might catch fish—a metaphor that would have delighted fisher people.

Sunday Readings

Jonah 3:1–5, 10

The people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast and all of them, great and small, put on sackcloth.

1 Corinthians 7:29–31

I tell you, brothers, the time is running out.... For the world in its present form is passing away.

Mark 1:14–20

Jesus said to them, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men." Then they abandoned their nets and followed him. [Jesus said,] "You are Simon the son of John; you will be called Cephas (which is translated Peter)."

In the beginning of the Jonah story, the prophet did not catch fish; one caught him. Later, the word he preached was very successful, his own spitefulness notwithstanding. The Ninevites were the sworn enemies of the Israelites, and Jonah did not want them to repent, but to be punished by God. Nevertheless, God's mercy was stronger than Jonah's spite. In the Gospel, Jesus calls his followers to set down their fishing nets and to launch into a life of catching people with the word of God. There is an eagerness here that is absent in the Jonah story. Furthermore, the disciples left their primary commitment—their patriarchal family—to accept Jesus' invitation.

As Pope Francis declared, we are all missionary disciples. Are we eager to respond, as were Jesus' disciples? Or do we think we should attend only to those whom we judge to be deserving? If so, have we forgotten that no one deserves God's mercy? It is a free gift to all. †

**Jesus calls his followers
to launch into a life
of catching people
with the word of God.**



A Word from Pope Francis

Let us not ignore God's word. It is a love letter, written to us by the One who knows us best. In reading it, we again hear his voice, see his face, and receive his Spirit. That word brings us close to God. Let us...carry it with us always, in our pocket, on our phone.

HOMILY, ST. PETER'S BASILICA,
JANUARY 24, 2021



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS REFLECTION

- Does the way you live witness to a merciful, loving God?
- Is there some change you should make?

Living Our Faith

Hosffman Ospino

There is not one exclusive way of living our relationship with Jesus Christ in the everyday. For some, the ideal model is that of monastic life in which men and women dedicate their lives to prayer and contemplation in a monastery, away from any distraction. For others, the ideal model is that of missionary life, bringing the message of the Gospel to distant lands in the midst of many challenges. Both models are attractive, and both continue to be sources of life for Christian communities around the world.

However, only a relatively small group of Christians are called to live their faith according to these two models. The majority of disciples of Jesus are called to give witness to our faith



somewhere in the middle, a point where contemplation and mission coincide in the here and now of ordinary life. For most Christians, this middle point is the daily experience of family life, work, and

social relations through which we hope to make the world a better place.

We discover there are many ways of encountering God and bringing others to participate in that encounter in the everyday. The wisdom of the Christian community has affirmed that each baptized person has the responsibility of living our faith mirroring the life of Christ in our own particular way. Consequently, Christian disciples embody the values of the Gospel according to the uniqueness of our circumstances. On the one hand, we share the same faith, believe in the same Lord, and await the same salvation. On other hand, we live our faith in the distinctiveness of our relationships and our decisions or states of life.

God continues to invite us to respond to the divine revelation with the gift of faith. We join Peter and Christians who have declared for generations that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. As we proclaim with joy at the Easter Vigil, "This is our faith! This is the faith of the Church! We are proud to profess it, in Christ Jesus our Lord!" †

From *Peter's Catechism* (pages 26–27; 39), available at Liguori.org.

Wisdom from Catholic UPDATE

From "The Joy of Being Catholic" by Kathy Coffey

Answers from Catholics: What about the Church brings you joy?

- "Sometimes I can't sleep or I'm feeling blue. Then I remind myself that somewhere in the world, the Mass is happening. Bread and wine are being consecrated into the Christ's body and blood. Knowing that buoys me."
- "The faith offers us a healthy way to approach death. The ritual comforts us by saying, 'It's not the end; we'll see this person again.'"
- "The best thing is the companions—Jesus, the prophets, the desert dwellers, the saints, each other!"
- "I can find good people other places, but not this remarkable liturgy."
- "I think of the Catholic Church as a massive family. We're all welcome." †

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Faithful God, give us the grace to witness to your presence so that others may know you are a loving, merciful God. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

The Redemptorists

WEEKDAY READINGS

January 22–27

Monday, Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children:
2 Sm 5:1–7, 10 / Mk 3:22–30


Tuesday, Weekday:
2 Sm 6:12b–15, 17–19 / Mk 3:31–35

Wednesday, St. Francis de Sales:
2 Sm 7:4–17 / Mk 4:1–20

Thursday, Conversion of St. Paul:
Acts 22:3–16 or Acts 9:1–22 / Mk 16:15–18

Friday, Sts. Timothy and Titus:
2 Tm 1:1–8 or Ti 1:1–5 / Mk 4:26–34

Saturday, Weekday:
2 Sm 12:1–7a, 10–17 / Mk 4:35–41

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Bringing Home the Word

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)

January 28, 2024

Teaching with Authority

Sr. Dianne Bergant, CSA

Who teaches with authority? To whose voice should we listen? The first reading provides an answer. Moses had been appointed by God to be God's voice for the Israelites—for that is what a prophet is. Moses assures the people that God will raise up a leader like himself. They are to listen to that voice just as they listened to his voice. The Gospel presents Jesus as the fulfillment of that promise.

The issues of contemporary life are extraordinarily complex. Actually, when one is in the midst of living, it is always complex. It was complex at the time of Moses and at the time of Jesus as well.

Sunday Readings

Deuteronomy 18:15–20

If a prophet presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded, or speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.

1 Corinthians 7:32–35

I should like you to be free of anxieties.

Mark 1:21–28

Jesus...said, "Quiet! Come out of him!"...He commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him.

So, to whose voice should disciples listen? It is easy to answer: "The one with authority." But who has authority? Recognizing genuine authority is not as easy as it sounds. Moses' position of authority was eventually recognized, but that was not the case in the beginning. The expression, "Who died and left you boss?" comes right out of an earlier story of Moses (Exodus 2:14). As for Jesus, he never held a recognized position of authority in his society, and we know his authority seems eventually to have been rejected by most.

A sign of genuine authority is seen in the integrity of one's life. Moses led the people through the struggles of the wilderness. In this Gospel, Jesus confirms the message of his teaching with his works of healing. Who has authority? "By their fruits you will know them" (Matthew 7:16). †

***A sign of genuine authority
is seen in the integrity
of one's life.***



A Word from Pope Francis

It is easy to be at peace with those we love and with those who do good towards us, but it is not easy to be at peace with those who have wronged us.... Let us ask the Lord, in silence, for the grace to give everyone, good and bad, the gift of peace.

"REGINA COELI" PRISON, ROME,
MARCH 29, 2018



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- What is your attitude toward authority in the Church, in civil society?
- Do you exercise authority with patience and compassion?

Healing Our Inner Pharisee

Valerie Schultz

The phrase “healing your inner child” is a pop-psychology mainstay. The idea is that we can only become well-adjusted adults if we have made peace with the issues of our childhood. It is a sensible idea, and one I’d like to borrow to confront another character who dwells within all of us: our inner Pharisee.

The Pharisees were appalled that Jesus did not observe the fine points of the law. And Jesus had little patience with the superficial behavior of the Pharisees, who had perhaps forgotten the true purpose of the laws they so scrupulously upheld. “He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart” (Mark 3:1). Yet most of us have a Pharisee lurking in our psyche.

My inner Pharisee plagues me. When I was a child, my mother called me her “little Pharisee,” because I came home from school with stories of the wrongdoing of the other kids—things that I, of



course, never did. It’s easy to be a little Pharisee when you are the perennial teacher’s pet.

When I was a church employee, my inner Pharisee was especially well-nourished. When someone asked the time of an activity, I would answer warmly but think, “Well, if you’d read your bulletin, you would know, wouldn’t

you?” When a parent complained that she could not convince her child to attend confirmation class, I would nod sympathetically but think, “Well, maybe if you showed up for Mass, your kid would come to class.” My inner Pharisee grew out of control.

Fortunately, God made me a parent, which humbles and humanizes me, and makes me aware of how far from holiness I am. My inner Pharisee is silenced whenever one of my daughters does something that makes me look bad. Parenting is one antidote to the inner Pharisee, as it makes us more compassionate and less judgmental, especially of those who share with us the struggles and joys of parenting.

Certainly laws matter; there are specific laws to which we Catholics are bound. But when obeying the law supplants faith and compassion, we have succumbed to our inner Pharisee. And our inner Pharisee, if not confronted and healed, merely “talks the talk,” while Jesus calls us to walk his walk. †

From *Liguorian*, March 2006

Wisdom from Catholic UPDATE

From “The Four Faces of Jesus” by Veronica Smith

Mark, the earliest evangelist, wrote between the years 65 and 70, shortly after Nero’s persecution of Christians. Possibly because of the loss of leaders such as Peter and Paul, Mark deemed it necessary to produce a written record of Jesus. Christianity’s rapid spread also suggests the need for an organized account of Jesus’ life. Mark’s Jesus is in a hurry. Mark introduces you to a Jesus you may not have met before—earthly, relatable, and approachable. In Mark, we meet the most human Jesus. †

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PRAYER

*Holy God, grant us the grace
to recognize the truth
when it is spoken and
live that truth in our daily lives.
We pray in Jesus’ name.
Amen.*

The Redemptorists

WEEKDAY READINGS

January 29—February 3

Monday, Weekday: 2 Sm 15:13–14, 30;
16:5–13 / Mk 5:1–20

Tuesday, Weekday: 2 Sm 18:9–10, 14b,
24–25a, 30—19:3 / Mk 5:21–43

Wednesday, St. John Bosco:
2 Sm 24:2, 9–17 / Mk 6:1–6

Thursday, Weekday:


1 Kgs 2:1–4, 10–12 / Mk 6:7–13

Friday, Presentation of the Lord:

Mal 3:1–4 / Heb 2:14–18 /
Lk 2:22–40 or 2:22–32

Saturday, Weekday:

1 Kgs 3:4–13 / Mk 6:30–34

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