

January 17, 2010  
Second Sunday in Ordinary Time  
Isaiah 62:1-5  
1 Corinthians 12:4-11  
John 2:1-11

In the history of the church there have been three Epiphany stories. The first, of course, is the coming of the Wise Men to Bethlehem. The second is the baptism of Jesus. And the third is Jesus' great miracle at a wedding in the small Gallilean town called Cana.

Last Sunday Deacon Bob told us about his friend who had an epiphany when, frustrated by winter, he started making snow angels. The clouds parted to reveal a bit of blue sky, and a sea gull, or was it a dove, soared overhead.

Epiphanies are signs of the presence of the divine among us. The birth of Jesus was itself an epiphany. So was his baptism, when he was revealed to be God's beloved son. And so were his actions in Cana—the beginning of his public ministry, according to the Gospel of John.

Now, how could saving an embarrassing situation—running out of wine at a wedding—be an epiphany? What was the point of turning the water for ceremonial washing into wine?

Those who knew the ancient prophecies would have understood. A new era had arrived. The Messiah had come. The world was being transformed.

“See, I am making all things new,” God declares in the Book of Revelation. That's what today's gospel is about. The old practices, like ceremonial washings, would no longer be necessary.

Centuries before Jesus, the prophets Joel and Amos had written about a time when God would recreate the world. Joel describes

mountains dripping with sweet wine. And Amos adds that the hills will flow with wine and that people will plant vineyards and gardens, eating their fruit and drinking their wine. A Jewish composition, almost contemporary with Jesus, talks about vines with “a thousand branches, and each branch shall bear a thousand clusters and each cluster produce a thousand grapes.” Anyone who knew these writings and witnessed the miracle at Cana would have gotten it. God’s kingdom was no longer in the future. God’s kingdom was now. Eternity had broken into time. And Jesus was the sign that this had happened.

Yet here we are, two thousand years later, still looking for signs of the divine in the world, still hoping that God is with us. The church tells us that God has not gone back on God’s promises. The kingdom, which is any situation where God’s will is being done, is here. But it sure doesn’t look like it much of the time. People are out of work; people have terrible illnesses; people are incredibly lonely; people see our fellow humans as threats who must be eliminated; people glorify every kind of violence. And there is incredible suffering in Haiti since last Tuesday’s earthquake, coming on top of all of the troubles and injustices that the majority of Haitians have endured. Where is God in all this?

What can we, as people of faith, say about a “natural disaster” like an earthquake? Earthquakes are good for the planet but cause so much trouble for people. Perhaps if the structures in Port-au-Prince had been built to withstand earthquakes a lot fewer of them would have collapsed. I started wondering if we were supposed to have remained hunter-gatherers. Earthquakes might have knocked us off of our feet but at least we wouldn’t have had big buildings falling on top of us. But, no, I concluded. Humans were meant to become “civilized.”

What I’m pretty sure of is that this is not some incomprehensible part of God’s plan! God is not a master puppeteer who decided let’s have a horrible disaster, so that people can learn humility and compassion. Is the agony of one living creature worth it? Should we worship any “god” who would act in this way?

We are still left however, with the promise that everything for humanity changed with the arrival of Jesus. I believe that. But where are the signs? Perhaps the problem is that we don't really think that things have changed, that God's kingdom is truly among us. We act like it's business as usual, and that's what we get.

But when we have the eyes to see, the signs are present. There is a great outpouring of compassion and help for the earthquake victims. And there's more. We're recognizing our common humanity. One of our staff members talked about watching the earthquake reports on t.v. in her warm beautiful house and thinking that she was in that situation because she was born into comfortable circumstances in our country and not born poor in Haiti. It was not that she deserved her good life and they did not. This realization is a sign of God's kingdom.

And we don't have to be passive believers. In today's second reading, St. Paul reminds us that God has given all of us spiritual gifts or talents to use in building the world God wants for us. So if we accept and acknowledge these gifts, it means that we're all God's ministers in some way. At next weekend's Masses, we'll have a special blessing to celebrate this. God is with us.

Amen.