

### ***God in Man Made Manifest***

In the name of him who first manifested his glory by changing water to wine, dear friends in Christ: During the twelve days of Christmas the Holy Christian Church on earth celebrates the mystery of the incarnation, the wondrous truth that in Jesus Christ the God of the universe has taken on human flesh and become a man. In the season of Epiphany we turn it around. The Church celebrates and observes that this very ordinary looking man, Jesus, who for thirty years lived as an unremarkable Jewish peasant in an insignificant village in out-of-the-way Galilee some two thousand years ago is in fact God.

This truth is revealed to us – or as we just sang, *made manifest* to us – in steps. We begin with Epiphany itself, the coming of the wise men. They are drawn to worship the infant Jesus because the Lord has written the announcement of his birth in the stars. God doesn't do that for the rest of us mere mortals. Last Sunday we had the Baptism of our Lord. There the divinity of Jesus was made manifest by the heavens opening, the Holy Spirit descending on him in the form of a dove, and the voice of the Father declaring "This is my beloved Son." In today's Gospel the truth that Jesus is God is manifested by the miracle he performs at the Cana wedding feast. In the weeks that follow, we'll see the man Jesus giving evidence of his divine power by other miracles that he performs. And then the Epiphany season will come to its concluding climax with the Transfiguration. Then we will join the disciples Peter, James, and John on the mountain, and witness with them Jesus revealing his Godly glory in beams of radiance that shine forth from his body. And, just in case we haven't got it yet, again we will hear the voice of the Father confirming "This is my beloved Son." At that point there should be no doubt in our minds: Jesus *is* God in man made manifest.

But as foundational as this truth is for our understanding of the Christian faith, it's not what I'm going to talk about today. No, this message is about how God is made manifest in you. It's about God making himself manifest in all of us together as the Body of Christ. This is what the Apostle Paul is writing about in today's Epistle: how *you* as a baptized and believing child of God have the Holy Spirit dwelling within you, and how to each one individually is given the manifestation of the Holy Spirit for the common good. That is to say, just as the work and power of God was seen in Jesus during his public ministry, so also the work and power of God's Holy Spirit is to be seen in you as you fulfill your daily vocations at home, at work, and in your life in the Church.

Of course, there is a huge difference. God in Jesus is part of his very being. He is one person with two natures, one human the other divine. You also are one person with two natures, one a sinful human nature and the other a redeemed and restored human nature; but both natures very human. The Spirit of God in you is not part of who you are. He's a different and separate being. Nevertheless, he *is* in you. And he is working with God's divine power in and through you. And his work in and through you must and will be made manifest. Again, this is what Paul is explaining to the Christians at Corinth in today's Epistle. But to help us understand what he's saying, I need to back up a bit and provide some context for his remarks.

Of all the churches planted by Paul during his many mission journeys, the one at Corinth was one he would have called his problem child. That's because if there's a problem a church can possibly have, they had it there. And though it meant much turmoil for them and many headaches for Paul, the Church today can rejoice that they did have so many problems. That's

because in the correspondence between Paul and the Corinthian congregation is recorded for us and for the Church of all ages the apostolic solutions for solving these problems whenever they arise – because they still do.

Anyway, one of the biggest problems at Corinth was the contentious attitude and competitive spirit that the members displayed when dealing with each other. It was as if they were all trying to claim the title as the best and most gifted Christian in the group. So each one was constantly talking himself up and talking the others down – not unlike the disciples of Jesus who were always arguing among themselves about which of them was the greatest in the kingdom of God. At the Corinthian church, this arguing was about who was the greatest was largely centered on the particular kinds of spiritual gifts the members were able to display. Paul lists some of them in the text. To some was given the gift to speak words of wisdom by divine inspiration, to others the gift of speaking a word of knowledge, to others the gift of healing, to others the power to perform miracles, to others the ability to speak words of prophecy, to others the ability to distinguish between good and evil spirits, to others the ability to speak spontaneously in foreign languages which they never studied like the disciples did on the day of Pentecost, and finally to others the gift of being able to miraculously understand foreign languages.

These are all good gifts. But they were being used in a bad way. What was happening was someone with a gift, say to speak prophecy, was using it in order to gloat over others who didn't have that gift. "Look at me! I can do this! And oh, you poor pathetic creature, is that all you can do?" The whole church was like a bunch of children on a playground bragging about their abilities and demeaning all the rest. Each one was doing his or her own version of that tired pep rally cheer: "I've got the Spirit, yes I do! I've got the Spirit; how 'bout you?" Needless to say, these attitudes and behaviors were destroying the Christian fellowship the congregation should have been experiencing. What's more, it was ruining the church's witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

And so Paul writes to correct them, "Concerning the things of the Spirit, brothers, I don't want you to be ignorant." Three things to point out in that short sentence: first that despite all their problems, Paul still calls them brothers. That is to say, sinning and erring believers in Christ who need correction are still believers Christ. It's only if they refuse to repent when corrected that their faith in Christ is called into doubt. Second, Paul calls the gifts they've been given "the things of the Spirit." That is, they don't belong to you. They are the Spirit's. And they are given to you for God's glory, not yours. And third, by saying "I don't want you to be ignorant", Paul is telling the members that at present they are ignorant. Their behavior proves it.

Paul then reminds the Corinthians of a time when they were totally ignorant and in the dark. "You used to be pagans, led astray to worship mute idols." But then God by his grace called you out of that darkness. Through the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ the Holy Spirit gave you the gift of faith. This is what he means when he says, "No one speaking in the Spirit of God says, 'Jesus is accursed!' and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Spirit." It's the same truth we know from the catechism, "I cannot by my own reason and strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified, and kept me with Jesus Christ in the one true faith."

And that, by the way, is the first manifestation of the Holy Spirit in you. The fact that you can say "Jesus is my Lord and Savior" and mean it is proof, to you at least, that God's Spirit *is* in you. No one else can see your faith. But if faith is there, you know it. You know the Holy Spirit is there working that faith in you. And if the Holy Spirit is in you working the gift of faith, then

you can anticipate that he will work in you other gifts as manifestations of the Spirit given for the common good.

That's what the Corinthians didn't understand. They thought of their spiritual gifts as means to exalt themselves, to prove their relative greatness, and to belittle others. Paul is telling them that the Spirit distributes his gifts in order that God's people may serve each other. Look again at that list of gifts: If the Spirit gives someone the ability to speak words of divine wisdom, it's not so that everyone will say, "Wow, you sure are wise", no, it's so that they will hear and benefit from that wisdom. The same is true of all the gifts listed there. Take healing, for example; we know that on occasion the Apostle Paul displayed this gift. Strange though, he wasn't able to heal his own ailment. And when he prayed for the Lord to take it away, the Lord told him no, he needed it to keep him humble. So it is with all the gifts of the Spirit. If the Holy Spirit gives you one or more of them, it's to enable you to serve the needs of other members of the Body of Christ.

Now, maybe you're wondering why we don't see people in the church with these gifts today. No one here to the best of my knowledge is spouting forth prophecies, performing miracles, or speaking miraculously in foreign languages. You're probably aware that in churches of Pentecostal persuasion they claim that such things continue to happen; but any honest evaluation of those claims will prove them to be false. No, as Paul explains later in his letter to the Corinthians, there would come a time when such spectacular gifts as these would cease. They were given for a brief time when the Christian Church was in its infancy, but with the passing of the apostles and the completion of the New Testament scriptures, the Spirit, in his wisdom, no longer gives them.

But that doesn't mean the Spirit has given up granting gifts. Indeed, later in this letter Paul tells the Corinthians that the gift of the Spirit they should all eagerly be seeking is not one of these showy kinds of gifts, but rather the greatest gift of all, which is the gift of Christian love. That's the gift we too should eagerly be imploring the Spirit to work in us: the ability to deny our own needs and comforts and to give ourselves sacrificially to serve the need of others – even as Christ our Lord left his place in glory, took on our flesh, and humbled himself even to the point of a shameful death on a cross to rescue us from our sins. Love is the gift God wants us all to have, and when we see it in our words and actions, what we are seeing is the manifestation of the Spirit of God in our midst. It doesn't come from us. It comes from God.

And there are other gifts the Spirit gives. To some are given the ability to better understand the Holy Scriptures, to others the ability to teach, to others the ability to lead, to others the ability to manage resources well, to others wealth that they may give in the service of the Gospel, to others skill sets that enable them to serve God's people in countless ways.

You too have been given gifts by the Spirit of God who is in you. And you likely know better than anyone else what they are; although it does happen that sometimes others recognize your gifts even if you don't. But whatever your gifts are, you face the same temptation that overcame so many at Corinth, namely, to think of that gift or gifts as something that makes you better, or more Christian, or more spiritual, or more valuable than some other members of the Body of Christ who are not gifted in the same way. Most of us have learned that it's impolite to speak these thoughts aloud; but none of us can deny having them. Examine your heart now and the Spirit in you will help you to see that it's true. And when you do, recognize it for the sin that it is and repent.

I need to add that the sin of being puffed up and prideful of the gifts the Spirit gives is not the only way to go astray. Another sin is being aware of a gift and being afraid to use it. "Why, if everyone knew I'm able to do this, then they'd call on me to do it. And then I'd be stuck serving." Yes, well, that's why the Spirit gave you the gift: to enable you to serve. Your unwillingness to do so springs from your lack of love. And for that the Spirit within you also calls you to repent.

One more: suppose you see a need that is not adequately being attended in the church or in the lives of one or more of the members of the Body of Christ, and you don't have the spiritual gift that addresses it. Here's a thought: ask for it. It's a gift, a gift the Spirit just might want you to have and at the same time remind you of where it came from and who gave it to you.

Paul tells us that to each believer is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good, and furthermore that these gifts are empowered by the one and same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. Therefore let the Spirit's will be done among us. Repenting of our sinful pride and our past failures to use the gifts we've been given, let us employ the Spirit's gifts as he intends: for the building up of the Body of Christ, for the spread of the saving Gospel, and for the glory of God who gave us the gift of his Son – his Son who is God in man made manifest and through whom God's Spirit is made manifest in us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

***Soli Deo Gloria!***