

BULLETIN -- JANUARY 3

Thank you to our choir and our liturgy assistants, who have spent so many hours practicing and arranging to get everything in good order for our Christmas celebrations. Christ our Light bursts upon us in splendor. Unlike the culture around us, which only concentrates on things leading up to a holiday and then gets back to “business as usual,” we revel in the preparation, the feast, and the glorious aftermath, extending our celebrations for two weeks or more. And we owe so much to those who work behind the scenes for helping us keep the spirit going! Thank you again.

Epiphany: wearing it on your sleeve. Because we are constantly getting it drilled into us that in the U.S. we have a false “wall of separation” between Church and state, many people have interpreted it to mean that religion must have absolutely no public display. I remember sitting in a restaurant some years ago and having a fellow patron come up to me, stare at my Roman collar, and proclaim huffily, “*That’s disgusting!*” I instinctively raised my napkin to my face, thinking she had spotted a glob of something hanging off my chin or nose that my companions hadn’t told me about.

“Wow, that was something!” one of my friends stated after the woman stalked off. We all agreed that we had (uncharacteristically) not been misbehaving or doing anything that could possibly give offense to anyone. “No, she was staring at your collar, man,” the others chimed in. “No doubt about it.”

“Well, whatever her problem is,” I offered, “she must need some prayer. God let her find someone who would give her some, and I shall, gladly. There are probably lots of people like that.”

And there are. Why do some people become so rabidly insistent about their atheism if they really believe the object of their hatred does not exist? Are they really envious, way deep down, of the faith and happiness of many Christians? Are they afraid to give in to that little voice inside all of us that tells us we must be here for a *reason*? And if for a reason, *whose* reason is it? Considering that religion has been a part of virtually all the world’s cultures from time immemorial, the frantic drive of atheism to debunk all religion really is the *abnormal* situation for human beings. This is not to say that all religions are the same. As Christian believers, we believe that other religions can indeed be a part of God’s preparation of the rest of the world’s peoples for the fullness of his revelation in Christ, just as he prepared his own Chosen People for that event throughout the Old Testament. And as Catholic believers, we profess at least once a week that the Church Universal proclaims and professes completely everything that God wants us to know about that fullness of his revelation. In the Church, we have both *menu* (the Word) and *meal* (the Sacraments). All other Christians, and even non-believers, are more or less related to us insofar as they share some aspects of both the revelation and the intimate divine activity of Christ the Lord.

The culture should never intimidate us, any more than the Roman Empire and its minions intimidated the Apostles and martyrs of the early Church. Think of it, a little rag-tag band of fishermen, a tax collector, and a few other hangers-on, taking on the world! It was accomplished with neither violence nor incontrovertible oratory. First and foremost, it was accomplished with the sterling example of Christians who lived in the

midst of that world, like the leaven in the dough, changing it from the inside out. That needs to happen today, and in every age. It's our mission.

Epiphany means not being ashamed of our faith before the world, any more than the Magi were ashamed of theirs before Herod. It does not mean browbeating others into submitting to our ideas or ways. That is not conversion, and certainly does not promote the change of mind and heart to which the Lord calls all of us. It *does* mean not being intimidated by those who might mock, snicker, ridicule, or get in your face for living and doing those things that are part and parcel of our faith in Christ. Pray for them, as Jesus taught us. Our mini-persecutions, at least at this time, can't even compare to those being endured by believers in other regions. Take a lesson from our fellow Christians who currently live in those parts of the world from which the Magi came. Today, they need our prayers. We never know. Tomorrow, we might need theirs.

“Communion.” Most Catholics, when we hear the word, instinctively think of the Eucharist, which is the supreme moment here on earth of union between disciples and their Lord. In Latin, the word *communio* carries at least as many meanings as the word *communion* does in English. *Communio* means, among other things, many turned into one without ceasing to be many. This is the image of our God: three in one, perfect union and yet perfect individuation. The only way to reach the state of *communio* is by loving. Love costs, love hurts, love makes us vulnerable (wound-able) but love is extraordinarily fulfilling, because we are made in the image and likeness of God, who is love.

Our Holy Communion with Christ in the Eucharist carries with it both inestimable privilege and serious responsibility. We ought never approach the Banquet of the Lord without submitting as well to sharing in his Sacrifice, without which the Banquet would have no meaning. **That means “sacrificing,” putting aside, all of our own agenda, our wants and needs, our pride and arrogance.** It means putting aside all that in order to *be in communion* with Christ and his Church. Practically speaking, this is why the Church is insistent on offering the Sacrament only to those who are in full communion with us. There are reasonable exceptions, but they should never be presumed. When we consider what the Eucharist means, we should be aghast when people approach the Sacrament in a casual manner (including the manner of dress), laughing, talking, chewing a cud of gum, thoughtlessly snatching the Host from the distributor, and/or parading out the door with a “been there, done that” attitude.

Prior to Communion at many weddings and funerals, many priests will offer an invitation similar to that to which I am accustomed: “Those who have received their First Communion in the Catholic Church, and who are planning *and prepared* to receive Holy Communion, may come forward at this time.” We are not trying to be exclusive. If someone feels left out, LET THEM TAKE INSTRUCTIONS AND MAKE THEIR FIRST COMMUNION WITH US! And the *preparation*? If someone has not been practicing their faith conscientiously, the preparation is CONFESSION, the sacrament of penance and reconciliation. We all need it. If we didn't, Christ would not have made the ministry of forgiveness and mercy one of his chief encounters with us through the Church. And if you don't think that's true, go back and re-read the words in bold print in the preceding paragraph. Let there be an Epiphany! God bless you!

Fr. Den

Thought for the week: “In recent years I find myself noting how the more relativism becomes the generally accepted way of thinking, the more it tends toward intolerance. Political correctness . . . seeks to establish the domain of a single way of thinking and speaking . . . it is vital that we oppose this imposition of a new pseudo-enlightenment, which threatens freedom of thought as well as freedom of religion” (Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger [1927- , Pope *emeritus* Benedict XVI] in *Without Roots* [2005]).