

Good News and hope for a new beginning greets us in the New Year of the Lord through a simple, solemn, yet striking revelation - God made man! The term 'Epiphany' is derived from the Greek *epiphaneia* which means a striking appearance, manifestation or revelation. Born into simple and humble beginnings in the quiet dark of the night Jesus is revealed to us as the "light of the world" (Jn8:12) and the bearer of a solemn promise of deliverance of all mankind from the snares of the world. Prophet Isaiah foretells how this light will radiate and empower the world through His Word. In His light all of humanity will see light (cf Ps36:9) because through his Epiphany Christ unites himself with humanity.

For by gold the power of a king is signified, by frankincense the honour of God, by myrrh the burial of the body; and accordingly they offer Him gold as King, frankincense as God, myrrh as Man.

- St. John Chrysostom

The Three Wise Men, the Gentile magi who came to do Him homage bearing gifts befitting a king, awaken within us a striking realisation that they represent all of us who are called to do likewise. United as one people of God we ought to feel urged to seek Him by journeying into the depths of our hearts and having recognised Him there, give Him praise by "falling to our knees" like the magi did, in divine worship of Him. Such an act acknowledges His kingship of the here and the hereafter - He is Emmanuel: God with us, for all times.

Read and reflect on how much comfort we can draw from today's readings! God gives us immense hope through His solemn goodwill promise of salvation because we "now share the same inheritance...and are parts of the same body..." We can also take away two parallels from the first reading for our study and life application: Firstly, the gift-bearing magi compel us to think of how we can gift the lord by making use of our gifts of time, expertise and experience, material goods... to serve others. Secondly, we note that the magi "returned to their own country by a different way." This indicates that when we encounter and enter into a relationship with Jesus, you and I will never return the same. Now, isn't that a comforting, and an inspiring thought? More than that, it is an epiphanic experience on an individual and social level for all Catholics! †



BE DISCIPLES OF HOPE

7th January 2018
Epiphany of the Lord

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NEW WAY OF BEING CHURCH



A Simple yet Striking Revelation!

This Sunday is the first in quite some time that we see vibrant green vestments return to our sanctuaries. Green is the colour of hope, seen in nature as growth and newness of life after the auburn of autumn come withered winter. It is this same joyful hope that characterises our journey as Christians – a journey led by Christ and narrated by the Church's liturgical year, with Ordinary Time nourishing us along an ordered path to the Cross of Christ and beyond the Upper Room where the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles, into the world to live in hope of the Kingdom of God.

And today, on this first of many green Sundays, we receive a message of hope that is both heartening and cautionary. In today's Gospel, St. John narrates Jesus' encounter with His first disciples with Jesus initiating the relationship with a question, "What is it that you seek?" Our own answer to this fundamental question defines our own discipleship. In our encounter with Christ, those with a long list of things that they seek may lose out on the very thing that Christ comes to give. In our eagerness to enunciate our desires and expectations, we may fall into the trap of being disciples that "do" Christianity, without first understanding the true essence of discipleship. By contrast, Andrew and the unnamed disciple, seek only to spend time with Jesus and allow Him to lead the way.

It is significant that the evangelist mentions the hour of the encounter – the tenth hour – for if a day were a lifetime, this would be the furthest point from the hour at which the Lord died upon the Cross – the ninth hour. For these new disciples, as for us, there is a lifetime of walking with Christ, of listening, of learning, of true discipleship, before we hope that we may truly understand that which we have sought from the beginning. And it is important not to get ahead of ourselves.

Andrew is quick to share the momentous news that he has found the Messiah with his brother, Simon. This profession of faith, which Simon echoes in the Synoptics when asked by Jesus, "But who do you say I am?" is indeed a prerequisite of discipleship. Nonetheless, it is merely the beginning, for there were hundreds of "messiahs" each with their own message and purpose and yet there is only one Lord Jesus Christ. Recognising His greatness, His holiness, even His relationship with God, does not mean that the disciples truly understand the reason for His coming. It is a start, and a good one, but finally the question "Who is Jesus to me?" holds zero significance until we have answered the question, "Who is Jesus?"

And how might we discover the answer to that question? By following where Christ leads, by listening to His word, by learning in a spirit of docile humility. And we must carry this first hope with us as we journey with Christ, and not act precipitously as did some of the disciples who felt they knew better than their Rabbi, nor lose it completely as did all but one when the time came for the messianic secret to be revealed. It is this hope, like a beacon, that will guide our path when the darkness of troubles and sufferings obscure the way forward. It is this hope, like the first green shoots of spring, that will encourage us when fear that the decaying winter of our lives has no end threatens to overcome us. It is this hope, we pray, that will embolden us to follow Christ to the Cross and beyond, to that place, where He lives and reigns with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. Amen. †

BE DISCIPLES OF HOPE **14th January 2018**
2nd Sunday In Ordinary Time

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Colour me
Hopeful

What might instill in us such great hope that we, like the first disciples in today's Gospel, leave behind all that we know, all that we have loved, to follow Christ? We hear this story so often that it is easy to play down the momentous nature of the act of faith the disciples made in abandoning everything to follow Jesus. They had families, a respectable, lucrative profession, and belonged to a community in which they played a vital role. Yet all of this they forsook on the promise of one man.

We are told in the Catechism that Christian Hope "is the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit." (CCC 1817) Hope is a dialogue between God and the soul that ignites a desire so great that no worldly joy can quench it. Here, Christ begins this dialogue of hope by announcing that "The time has come ... and the kingdom of God is close at hand." If this proclamation does not stir in you some sense of joyful expectation, then maybe life is treating you so well that your love for the 'kingdom of self' obscures any hope of something greater in the kingdom of God.

God calls each of us where we are in our lives. And in our lives, we have been given all that is necessary to hear and respond to God's call. When life brings sadness and suffering we seem to be more receptive to the message of hope that Christ proclaims. We yearn for better days, for a joy that will lighten the burdens we carry in the world. However, the opposite is often true of periods of stability and prosperity. In these times, there is happiness to be had in the here and now, satisfaction in our achievements, and hope for still greater progress in our lives. We have a tendency to become self-assured and self-reliant, thinking, perhaps, that should the kingdom of God be manifest now, it would almost be a shame to give up all the pleasures we enjoy. When we lower the kingdom of God to our level and, in our prayers, only aspire to greater joys in this life, then we extinguish the hope that Christ comes to us to give.

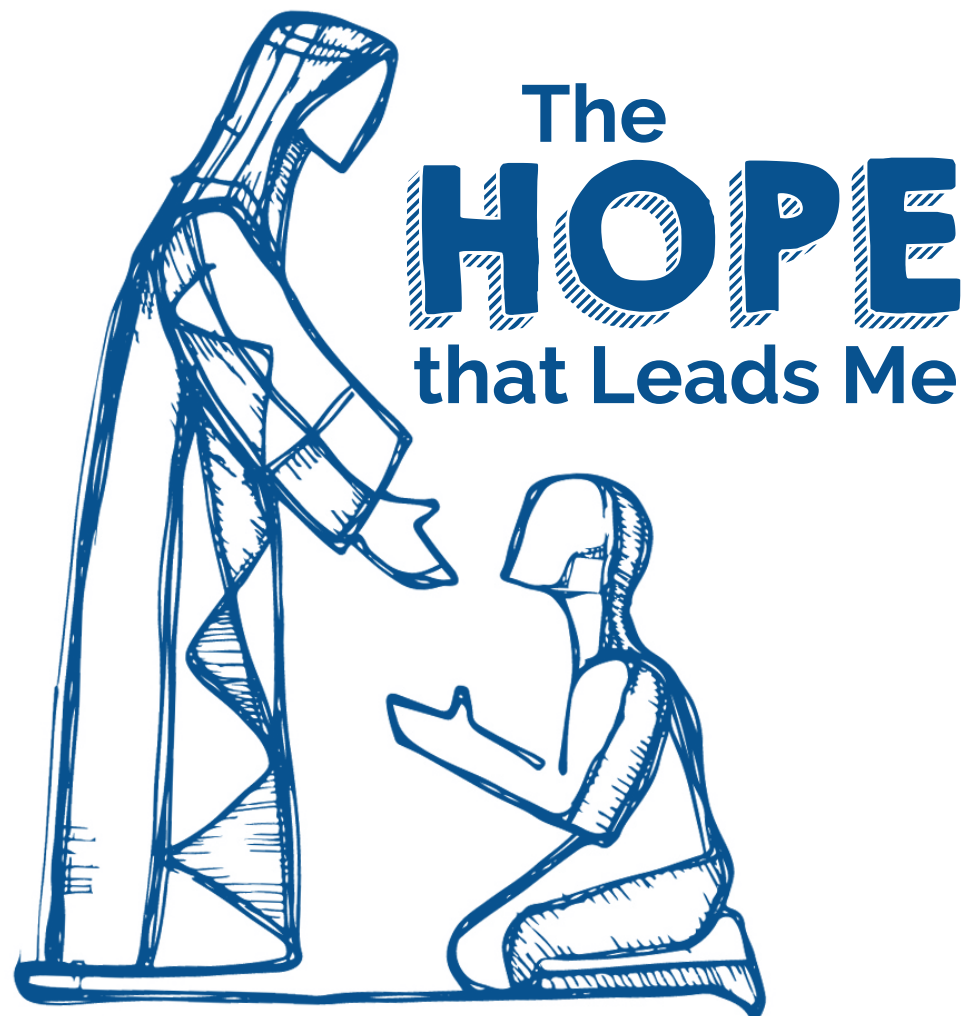
The first disciples may have lived good and happy lives, but we can see from their response to Christ's call, that they had a certain perspective. As fishermen, they would likely have known that their prosperity was not dependent on their skill alone, but on something greater than themselves; that self-reliance had its limits when tides drew their daily catch into deeper, inaccessible waters, or when storms rose in fury and threatened both livelihood and life itself. They would have recognised that their success was a blessing and their prosperity a gift that could so easily be taken away. Can we say the same of ourselves? When Christ called these first disciples, He called them to that thing that is greater than themselves. He called them to a participation in Himself, in His salvific mission. He called them to that hope which aspires to the very source of joy from which every blessing in this life comes; joys which are a pale reflection of the kingdom to which we are invited to live for eternity.

As with all the theological virtues, hope is acquired by human actions that are sanctified by divine grace. And as we all desire happiness, so must we dedicate our search for it to God, and see in its gift a glimpse of that happiness beyond our comprehension, which Christ calls us to today. Responding to that call may not always bring joy in the conventional, worldly sense – for the countless martyrs on whose bones our Church is built, it brought precisely the opposite – but when our joy is Christ Himself, all material pleasures lose their lustre and can be left behind – as the disciples left their nets, their families, their lives – as we follow the source of all joy to its source and summit. †

BE DISCIPLES OF HOPE **21st January 2018**
3rd Sunday In Ordinary Time

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The day was the Sabbath and the place was named for the comfort and rest of the Sabbath – Capernaum – after Nahum the prophet. And these are not incidental details but are of themselves prophetic, speaking, through the veil of symbolism, of the person and mission of Jesus.

The Sabbath was the divinely instituted day of rest for the Jews, remembering how God Himself rested after the creation of the heavens and the earth, the liberation of the Hebrews from captivity in Egypt, and the hope of the Messianic age and life in the world to come. The physical rest prescribed by the Law pointed to a spiritual end, which by the time of Jesus, much as is the case with The Lord's Day in our own times, had become dulled by eyes that look only to man's earthly cares. It is, perhaps, for this reason, that Jesus chose the Sabbath here in Capernaum, and elsewhere, to illumine the eyes of His people through His words and actions.

In the confrontation with the unclean spirit, the identity of Jesus is revealed as "The Holy One of God", not a traditional Messianic title but rather one far greater than the earthly liberator-king so keenly expected. The Holy One of God comes to make the Sabbath holy; to give it back its meaning and bring that meaning to its full consummation, and He does this first by demonstrating His power over the forces of evil. By cleansing the man of his evil possession, Jesus restores peace to his tortured soul, prefiguring our own ransom from sin and the restoration of peace between man and God. Yet, despite the initial wonderment at this and the many other miracles performed in Capernaum, spiritual apathy palled their eyes, leading Jesus to condemn the city, "And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You shall be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day." (Matthew 11:23)

Does similar condemnation await us for our own spiritual apathy in keeping the Day of the Lord holy? It has been declared by the Lord a day of rest not just from work but for the glory of God. The Mass in which we are bound by the law of love to participate is not just a rote action performed out of obligation, but a living worship of the God who has delivered us from sin and death, and restored us to peace with Himself. And the communion we participate in is not that of a symbolic communal meal among friends, but the communion of the Body of Christ, His Church, with our head, Christ Himself, which lifts us beyond the here and now, the handshakes and greetings, to the Banquet of the Lamb, where with the Saints we hope to continue the worship we begin here for all eternity.

So, how was your Sunday? Did you pass it as did the Pharisees and Scribes, fulfilling your obligations but nary an iota more? Did the Lord's greatest miracle, the Eucharist, in which the Holy One of God comes to us to make us holy, inspire you with wonder, or did you pass it by with barely a thought of its profundity? As the next Sunday approaches with its promise of rest for the weary, ponder upon that rest which should be our greatest hope: to encounter Christ; to be cleansed and healed of the scars of our sins; to be fed by His word and His flesh; and to taste of that eternal peace which to enter in to His Kingdom. †

BE DISCIPLES OF HOPE **28th January 2018**
4th Sunday In Ordinary Time

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In
HOPE
I Find My Rest

