NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

God is the God of all

Thomas Gumbleton | Jan. 7, 2010 The Peace Pulpit

As we celebrate this Feast of the Epiphany, the manifestation or the showing forth of Jesus to all the nations, it?s important for us, I think, to hear the lessons and to celebrate the feast with the words of our Eucharistic Prayer in the forefront of our awareness, the prayer that we recite as we celebrate the Eucharist at the altar. You?re familiar with the words, I?m sure. We start out: ?Yes, God, you are holy. You are kind to us and to all. For this we thank you. We thank you above all for your son Jesus. You sent him into this world because people had turned away from you and no longer loved one another. Jesus opened our eyes and our hearts to understand that we are brothers and sisters and that you are the one God of us all.?

Those are words that are very important, and we proclaim them with great joy and with assurance as we celebrate this feast.

?You are the one God of us all? -- we are brothers and sisters -- the whole human family are sons and daughters of God. It?s been wrong the way that religions in the world, including our Christian religion and our Catholic church, have tried to be exclusive, as though one or another had the whole message, the whole truth and other people weren?t part of God?s family.
These lessons today teach us so clearly that God sent God?s Word, Jesus, into the world, not just for a few, but for all, for everyone.

The Epiphany of the Lord
Isaiah 60:1-6
Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 10-11, 12-13
Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6
Matthew 2:1-12
Full text of the readings [1]

Listen again to the words that Isaiah proclaims when he tells us: ?Nations will come to your light. Lift up your eyes, look around and see, they are all gathered and come to you, your sons from afar, your daughters tenderly carried. This sight will make your face radiant, your heart throbbing and full. The wealth of nations,? all the nations,? will come to you, all singing in praise of God.?

That part of Isaiah is a reflection or a continuation of what we find earlier in this book of the prophet Isaiah, where God tells the servant in chapter 49, ?It?s not enough that you be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob, to bring back the remnant of Israel. I will make you the light of all the nations.? See, God is promising to send God?s Word into the world to be the light of all nations, not just of the chosen people, not of an exclusive few, but everyone. God?s Word comes into the world, Jesus, for all the nations.

Even earlier in that book of Isaiah, there?s another beautiful passage which also tells us why God comes for all the nations. It?s in the second chapter. The prophet says, ?All the nations will stream to Jerusalem saying, ?Come, let us go to the mountain of God, to the house of the God of Jacob, that God may teach us God?s ways, we may walk in God?s paths.? God will rule over all the nations and settle disputes for all peoples,? and here?s what will happen if we hear God?s word and accept the one God sends. ?They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not raise sword against nation. They will train for war no more.? The prophet then pleads, ?O nation of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of God.? Follow God?s ways and peace will come, when we accept all members of the human family as our brothers and sisters.

That was what Paul was speaking about too, when he says, ?This is the good news.? Now the non-Jewish people share the inheritance in Christ Jesus. The non-Jews -- all the nations -- are incorporated and are to enjoy the

promise. What a beautiful message, and how often we narrow it down and we try to be exclusive. We forget that we?re all members of the one human family. We?re all sons and daughters of God.

Certainly that?s what Matthew was making clear in the gospel message today. These so-called magi were wise leaders from nations much farther east than the Holy Land. In fact, Matthew makes it very clear that they are not following the ways of the Jewish law, because they?re searching the heavens, looking for stars to tell them. That was something totally forbidden in the Jewish law, and yet these people come and Jesus is revealed to them. They go back to their own land, they don?t become Jews; they are still sons and daughters of God. God had revealed to all the peoples of the planet, everyone. That was a very important message for Matthew to speak to the community for which he write the gospel because of the four gospels, Matthew?s gospel is written for a Jewish community.

They were a community that kept on insisting, in order to accept Jesus, you had first to become a Jew and accept the 613 laws of the Torah. You had to be a faithful Jew and then follow Jesus. Matthew was saying, ?Look, that isn?t so. God came for everyone. These Magi come from the east. They even follow ways that go against the Torah, and yet God has revealed to them, they fall down and worship the son of God made present in Jesus.?

This is the message of today?s feast, that God is the God of all, that we are all one human family, we are all brothers and sisters. If we began to live that way, how different our world could be.

If we look at the Vatican Council documents, which were kind of a renewal of our understanding of our church and of our religion, there are two that are especially important for what these scripture lessons today are telling us. The very first document, when you look at the 16 of them, is called ?Lumen Gentium,? which means ?light of the nations.? This document is all about what the church is and should be. It?s a community of the disciples of Jesus. Jesus came to be the light of all the nations, and we who are his disciples, the community of his disciples, if we really become what he has called us to be, we will be the light of all the nations, and all peoples will be welcomed into our one human family, brothers and sisters, if we really shine forth as this light of the nations. That?s all Jesus asks us to be -- to be like he was, one who draws all people, not forcing them to follow all of our ways, but only to understand that God has entered into human history, the God who is the God of all, and that we are all members of that human family, which is God?s family; we are sons and daughters of God.

The final document of the Vatican Council is the one we call the ?Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.? This document begins with a very beautiful sentence that expresses a truth, but also is a profound challenge. It gives us direction on what it means to be one human family. The document begins: ?The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of all peoples, especially the poor and the oppressed, are the joys, the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the church, of God?s people.? That is the way that we carry out being the light of the nations, that we accept everyone in the human family as our brother and sister so that the joys and the hopes of everyone, especially the poor and the oppressed in our world, these become the joys and the hopes of the followers of Jesus.

We insist that we are one human family, we reach out to our brothers and sisters, we share in their sufferings and their joys, their hopes, their griefs, their anxieties. We become one in a human family. Again, it seems to me the challenge to us today is very clear. We hear with great joy that God has sent God?s Word, Jesus, into our midst to proclaim the good news that we are all brothers and sisters and God is the one God of us all. Now the challenge is for us to live this message, to reach out to everyone in our human family, to accept every one as our brother or sister, a child of the same God. When we begin to do that in our attitudes and in our ways of acting, our world can change dramatically, and our neighborhoods and our community and our nation, in among all the nations, when we truly accept and act on the truth that God is the God of all, we are all brothers and sisters in the one human family, God?s family.

[Bishop Gumbleton preached this homily at St. Hilary Parish, Redford, Mich.]

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