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Luminosity

Patricia Datchuck Sánchez | Jan. 4, 2014 Spiritual Reflections

A well-circulated Hasidic tale tells the story of a rabbi quizzing his students. He asked, "How can we determine the hour of dawn, when the night ends and the day begins?"

One of the students suggested, "Day begins when, from a distance, you can distinguish between a dog and a sheep."

"No," answered the rabbi. Another student asked, "Is it when you can distinguish between a fig tree and a grapevine?"

The Epiphany of the Lord

Isaiah 60:1-6
Psalm 72
Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6
Matthew 2:1-12

Again the answer was "No." "Please tells us the answer then," said the students.

"It is," said the rabbi, "when you can look into the face of other human beings and you have enough light in you to recognize them as your brothers and sisters. Up until then, it is night, and darkness is still with us."

Today we celebrate Epiphany, the joyous realization that our God has manifested the good light of forgiveness and redemption in our world. While we remember with gladness the One whose birth made light live and move among us, we also have to admit that the darkness of which the rabbi spoke continues to overshadow many of us and our communities. To put it another way, the mystery Paul was privileged to reveal -- that all peoples of the earth are co-heirs, members of the same body and co-partners in the promise of Jesus through the Gospel -- has not yet been fully realized among us. As long as there are divisions, as long as there are bias, prejudice and ethnic hatred, we continue to find ourselves in a darkness that longs for the dawn. Therefore, as we celebrate this feast of Epiphany, we are to recognize and realize its challenge: to be living reflections of the light of Christ for all people.

In the first reading, Trito-Isaiah envisions a cavalcade of nations streaming toward Jerusalem, with a shared desire to find the Lord of light and goodness and glory, and offer their praise. In today's Gospel, Matthew expresses the faith of the early church, who believed that Jesus is the Lord of light and glory in whom all the nations of the earth, represented by the Magi, will find salvation. While it is easy and quite comfortable to talk

about visions of world unity, the challenge of Epiphany is to make it so, beginning not necessarily on a national level but with ourselves. To prompt our efforts, Roland Faley suggests that we ask ourselves a few questions (*Footprints on the Mountain*, Paulist Press, 1994). Do we think we have no bias because we treat our Hispanic gardener well? Is there any genuine social interaction in our neighborhood? Apartment complex? Do we still tell and laugh at ethnic jokes? How long has it been since people of a different color ate at our table, visited our home or swam in our pool? To what extent is our neighborhood segregated? To what extent are our attitudes segregated?

The feast of Epiphany provides us with a lovely tableau of streaming nations, of stars and kings bearing valuable gifts with which to honor Jesus, child of Mary, Son of God. But that tableau can only come to life if each of us reaches out to another and values the other as a beloved child of God and a brother or sister. We need not travel to faraway places to realize the grace of Epiphany. We need only look to our right and our left, to the neighbor next door or across the street, to our coworker or our boss, the relative we'd rather avoid or the friend we can't forgive. Every person whom God puts on our path is both a gift and an opportunity -- a gift, because they carry within them the precious light of God's love; an opportunity because they enable us to make the challenge of Epiphany real and practical.

As we pray together today, let our hearts be true. As we are sent forth from celebrating Epiphany, let us remain mindful that we are to carry forth with us the light of Christ and allow that light to illumine all we are, all we say and all we do until God gathers us together again.

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