

Epiphany I Sermon

In the Name of the Father, the Son and.....Amen.

St Augustine once said, in relation to today's Gospel reading, that "The Word of God is never silent, though it is not always heard". Christ teaching in the Temple as a 12-year-old is, in one sense no great wonder- He is the word of God, the second person of the Trinity. He is the Logos, the creator who holds all things and fills all things. Yet, he came to us as an infant. He came to us and assumed our nature, he took our life, and redeemed it. As a real and tangible human, he comes and speaks to us through humble circumstances.

He enters into the world and speaks- and yet, despite the fact that the Second person of the Trinity broke into human life, there are always those who ignore His speaking. There are always those who can't hear his teaching. The enemy isn't some unknown power out there, *the enemy takes root here*, in our own hearts. We within the Church aren't immune from ignoring the word of God- in many ways we are the worst offenders.

The question then is what keeps us from his life-giving words? What stands in the way of our illumination?

St Paul answers this question in today's epistle and The Blessed Virgin Mary provides a paradigm for how we put that answer into practice. Firstly, St Paul identifies the malady which keeps us from hearing Christ and His Truth, as conformity to this world. He tells us that we must not be conformed to this world, that we must live differently as Christians. To understand what St Paul is saying we need to define terms. The first concept we need to unpack is that of conformity.

Conformity is the act of matching attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours to group norms or being like-minded. Norms are implicit, specific rules, shared by a group of individuals, that guide their interactions with others.

The second term is the world, which is identified by St Paul as nothing less than the dominion of Satan. It is the corrupted pattern of human life, it is living in the opposite way God intended us to live.

The hallmark of the world is self-service, self-advancement, pride, envy, and self-gratification. The heart of the world is pride and selfishness. We are constantly absorbing these attitudes because they play on our baser nature. They are comfortable to us and they are easy. The world today is no more corrupt than it was in St Paul's day- this is something we must always remember. That is why the words of Scripture are universally applicable- they speak to all times and all places.

The Christian, according to St Paul must reject systems which inculcate pride, self-service, oppression, and self-gratification. The remedy, St Paul tells us, is self-sacrifice. The remedy is service to God and to others. The remedy is found in what, or better yet who, we are being conformed to. If we live the life of Christ, the life of sacrifice, obedience, and love, we become conformed to Him. We become cruciform- this process is called deification- being made like God.

We are transformed by the renewing of our minds, by grace, into Christ. If we become conformed to this world we are not cruciform, we become like Lucifer, we become Luciform. That is the exact opposite of what Christians are called to be.

Hearing the Word of God can be difficult. The process of being transformed is hard. More often than not we don't understand who and what we are called to be. However, Scripture gives us the perfect human model for cruciformity.

We are given the perfect model of someone who heard the Word of God, even though it was shocking, radical, and mysterious. That person is the Blessed Virgin Mary.

When Our Lady and St Joseph found Christ teaching in the Synagogue they marvelled at His wisdom and doctrine. When he answered their questions, He made known the fact that He was fulfilling the Will of God the Father. What a hard-saying from the Lord, what a difficult concept to understand! And even though it was difficult, we see that Our Lady does the perfect thing. She holds these sayings in her heart. Time and again we see in Scripture that Our Lady accepts the mysterious proclamations of God and holds them in her soul, she keeps them and contemplates them.

Then, as we see time and again, those words, spoken by the Very Word himself, become manifested in her life. They become the foundation for her actions, her life of sacrifice, and her conformity to the life of her Son. Our Lady is, without exception, the perfect model of discipleship. Her purity, chastity, and obedience are the actions which oppose this world of pride, envy, and self-service.

We need to follow our mother's footsteps. We need to sit under her tutelage and allow her to point us to her Son. The moment we fully embrace the truth of being transformed by God's grace, is the moment we will hear His words. It is the moment in which the Body, as St Paul tells us, becomes like her head.

Once we begin to live a life of service and sacrifice as a Church, encouraging each other in the pursuit of hearing the Word and His teaching, we will become a force to be reckoned with. Once we ourselves are transformed we will begin the steady process of transforming our neighbourhood.

We will become a beacon of Christlikeness *in the world*. Our mission isn't to hide away, it isn't to seek shelter, it is to boldly proclaim the Truth. Just as Christ, in his epiphany, in his manifestation to the world, made himself known amongst us, sinners, so too must we be his instruments of healing. We must be his co-workers. That is our purpose, and by God's grace, that is how we defeat the corruption of this prideful, envious, and selfish world.

A blessing I pray for all of us, In the Name of the Father...Amen.