

Epiphany and Prayer in the Midst of Chaos

Though we transferred the Feast of the Epiphany of Our Lord to this past Sunday, yesterday was the actual day. It traditionally celebrates the coming of the Magi to visit the child Jesus, Jesus' baptism in the Jordan, and Jesus' first miracle, the turning of water into wine at a wedding in Cana. Yesterday was, of course, a lot of other things, too. Epiphany is an "appearance" or "manifestation." It's a revelation about reality, about the truth. And yesterday the events at the nation's capitol building were clear manifestations—they were a revelation of what a disregard and even abhorrence of the truth means for human life and community: a true revealing, an epiphany, of what it means to deny or neglect the truth. Christians must distinctly be people of the truth. Jesus' claim was that he *is* the truth (John 14:6). This is why it has been so egregious and deeply saddening to see so many self-professed Christians go along with a complete alternative reality and violent aggression against the truth in recent years, willing to accept and even support falsehood, lies, and deceptions in order to get something out of a political spectacle of demagoguery and self-interest—to "get their way" through sycophantic delusions, as if the ends justify the means. Truth be damned if "winning" sits on the other side of such a chasm of deceit.

I must admit that watching the scene unfold on the news yesterday left me with a great sense of cynicism. America looked very much like a failed state as an armed band of domestic terrorists, reeking of privilege and under the delusion that they are somehow the oppressed and aggrieved, attacked their own nation's seat of government under the influence and instigation of the sitting president who continued, even in the midst of the attack, to feed their frenzy and tell them the country has been stolen from them and their action is understandable, maybe even heroic. And more, the group was essentially allowed to continue their siege for hours. One can think back just a few months to the summer when people of color and others with them peacefully protesting against racial injustice were arrested, beaten, kidnapped by federal agents, and worse, while yesterday a white militia armed with guns and pipe bombs were left for hours to walk freely in the halls of the capitol taking selfies at podiums or with their arms around statues or sitting at the Speaker's desk.

After hours of being engrossed in this, half in disbelief and half completely unsurprised, I went into the side chapel of the church to say evening prayer, as I do alone each morning and evening on behalf of the congregation while we cannot meet together, with all this on my mind. Evening prayer opens with the words: "O God, make speed to save us; O Lord, make haste to help us." I had to sit with that for a minute before moving on.

It's the great Epiphany of Christ—God coming among us in the darkness, isolation, and fear of Christmas night; in the waters of chaos among the mass of sinners on the riverbanks of the Jordan in Christ's baptism; in the humility of ordinary life turned glorious and miraculous at a wedding feast—that makes that "sitting" in the midst of God's help and salvation possible, as the turmoil that descended yesterday in our national life, and that meets us often in our own personal lives, is where Christ's "appearance" takes place. And the appearance of God in the midst of the world's chaos isn't a magic wand that forces everyone into submission and order, but a presence of love that enables us to reach out and touch both the God who gifts that love to us and the world around us that is so in need of it, even in the midst of the chaos that is pervasive. Christ's new creation—the redeeming of the world and making all things new—is not a tyrannical overpowering of the world; it's not like the forceful violence we saw yesterday or the demagogic powers that gave rise to them. Nor it is a superficial bliss that acts as if the pain,

suffering, and hardships of our life and world don't really matter. Christ's redemption makes all things new through the touch of perfect love entering all of those spaces, being present within them, and turning them toward that love.

So as we turn to God in prayer for our nation, for unity in the midst of divisions, for love instead of bigotry, hatred, and violence, and for the pursuit of truth rather than the spurn of it, let us pray also in thanksgiving for the epiphany, the appearance of Christ with and among us, and have the courage to ask God to make us more and more instruments of Christ's redemption—that the help and salvation of God might make its appearance in and through us; that we might become the very raw materials of Christ's new creation.

- Fr Jarred

Grant, O God, that your holy and life-giving Spirit may so move every human heart, that barriers which divide us may crumble, suspicions disappear, and hatreds cease; that our divisions being healed, we may live in justice and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.