

HOMILY EPIPHANY YRA 2017

Years ago, long before I was a priest, I volunteered at church for MCREST (Macomb County rotating emergency shelter team). I think we did something similar at St. Edith in the past. The people in the program were homeless. If they had a drug or alcohol problem they had to be in treatment. They were working with social services and had to be working or looking for a job and permanent housing. They had to be in the church by 5:00. They had to take a breathalyzer test, and if they blew anything, we had to report them and they would immediately be excluded from the program. Dinner was at a certain time, showers, recreation at a certain time. Lights out at a certain time. All these rules. And one more rule involved smoking. They could go outside to smoke on the hour but only if a volunteer went out with them, to prevent them from getting drugs or alcohol during that time. The volunteers they all agreed that none of them were smokers, it was really cold out and the people should not be smoking anyway. There was one young guy named Shaun that wanted to go out to smoke. I felt sorry for him, so I decided to go out with him. When we got outside he said: "I heard the conversation you had about smoking. I appreciate you coming out with me. I should quit smoking but with everything else that is going on in my life I just can't quit now." Because of this we made a connection, and I heard his story in bits and pieces during the evening. In short, his father took off when he was a baby. He had a learning disability, never did well in school, and the kids picked on him. His mother was sick and could not work regularly. He quit school at 16 so he could work. His mother died when he was in his early 20's. He had a series of unskilled jobs, and when he lost his job, he had no savings, no one that could support him financially, and he was evicted from his apartment and homeless. He told me: "I drink sometimes, but I am not an alcoholic. But if they want me to go to AA meetings I am going to go because I need to stay in this program." It dawned on me. I could have been Shaun. My Father died when I was young. I had a learning

disability, double vision, and did not do well in school and the kids picked on me. But my Mother was not sick. I got surgery to correct my vision problem, and I had many people in my life to love and help me. I was no different than Shaun, I just had more advantages.

Today we celebrate the feast of the Epiphany. Epiphany is a sudden intuitive insight into something that was previously hidden. The Church names three events in the life of Jesus that revealed Christ, the Magi, that we heard about in the Gospel reading today, the wedding feast at Cana where Jesus turned water into wine and the Baptism of the Lord that we will celebrate Monday. We also have these intuitive insights from God today. I think my experience with Shaun was an epiphany. Before that experience I had all kinds of stereotypes about the poor and the homeless. The biggest one was that the poor and homeless are different than me. That meant that I could never be poor or homeless. Those people are not like me. My experience with Shaun changed all of that. It was an epiphany.

What can we learn about epiphanies from the Gospel reading today? The Magi saw a star at its rising, something unexpected, and were open to following it to see what this would bring. The chief priests and scribes were not open to something unexpected. When Herod asked them they knew right away that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem. They had been preparing all of their lives for the Messiah to come, and here he was. Wouldn't you think that at least one of them would have asked the Magi if they could go with them to find the Messiah, but not one of them did? They knew that the child would be around 2 years old. Bethlehem was a small town. Scripture scholars tell us that there were only 20- 30 boys under the age of 2 at the time. He would not have been hard to find, but none of them looked. None of them were open.

I think God tries to communicate with us all the time, and if we are not open, we miss it. It is not always what happens to us that is important but how we respond to what happens. What caused me to go outside that night while Shaun smoked? I think it was God. And I certainly did not expect to get some profound insight while I was out there, but that is exactly what happened. I was open to the experience and listening. And I think it happens when we least expect it. It sometimes happens for me when something happens that I did not want or expect. That is when I have to be really open to what I may be called to learn. I may have an epiphany.

11:00 CYO Mass: When we play CYO sports, what would we like to happen? We want to win. We want to make the winning basket or touchdown or score the winning goal. We want to be seen as the most valuable player on the team. But all of these things usually do not happen for us. So when they don't, ask yourself what you are supposed to learn. Maybe you are the person that helps someone else be the star, and that is certainly important to them. Maybe you are supposed to learn how important it is to be part of a team, whether or not you win. Maybe you are supposed to learn that basket ball is not something you are really good at, but you can be part of it and have fun. Maybe you need to learn that you are not good at sports, so you should look for what you are really good at. Maybe writing or math or music is what you are good at. Maybe that is where you will shine. So, when things do not turn out the way you would like, be open to what God may be telling you. It may be an epiphany.