

SPIRITUAL VISION: THE CALL OF CHRIST.

A sermon preached by the Rev'd Richard B. Markham,
at St. Mary's Episcopal Church, Staten Island, N.Y.
at the Sung Mass on the Second Sunday after Epiphany,
January 19, 2003.

Old Testament Lesson: 1 Samuel 3: 1-10, 11-20; Epistle: 1 Corinthians 6: 11b – 10;
Holy Gospel: John 1: 43-51



I WANT TO FOCUS OUR ATTENTION TODAY on something which I believe is important for anyone who wishes to do the Christian spiritual journey. That subject is spiritual vision, something which is appropriate for us to consider during the season of Epiphany. We know that Epiphany is all about revelation, that is the manifestation of God in and through the life and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. Christians both proclaim and celebrate throughout Epiphany Jesus as the light which has come into a dark and sinful world.

The holy Gospels appointed for the liturgies throughout Epiphany can be understood as “little epiphanies,” because they manifest God’s glory in the presence of Christ’s miracles: the changing of water into wine, the curing of lepers, and the miracle of giving sight to the blind. Our Lord’s teachings concerning the Kingdom of God and His call inviting people to become active participants in that Kingdom, enabled others to vision life in the present to be filled with spiritual joy. Jesus enabled people to see through spiritual eyes that the Kingdom He was talking about was to be experienced as a here and now reality as well as a future hope. This revealed Kingdom of ministry and reconciliation with God could be something explored in daily life for every generation of disciples who proclaimed the Lord to be the Way, the truth, and the life.

To really understand the human life of Jesus as he grew in wisdom and stature throughout his boyhood in Nazareth, and to adequately understand His teachings as He dialoged with the priests and scribes in the temple, we need to have spiritual vision: insight and knowledge of His word, God’s will for us as we journey throughout life. That spiritual vision is obtained on different levels of being, especially through listening attentively to scripture, prayer and meditation. It is a vision of Christ which grows sharper as we approach the sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ in Holy Communion. That outward and visible sign of inward and spiritual grace, enabling the mutual indwelling of Christ in us and we in Him.

Spiritual vision, the ability to both *see* and *put into practice* in our daily lives the presence of Christ’s light is central to all that we pray and hope for in the journey. This vision enables transformation. Simple, ordinary lives like yours and mine have the potential to become like the life of Christ, who in His full humanity becoming at one with us, rises us to the level of His divine life. Our spiritual eyes enable us to “see” ourselves in God’s image, a rather unique and different vision of human life related to a secular world view. Because we are more than often blinded to the light of Christ, whether deliberately or unavoidably, we blot out the appearances of Jesus simply because we choose to do our own thing, that is life on our own terms.

Yes, you and I are continuously engaged in a decision making process: the choice to live without a vision of God, maybe even to the point of living quite well as a matter of fact, even in the face of conflict, doubt and suffering as all of these creep into our lives more frequently than expected. We can choose between denying the reality of God and his bountiful love for us, unconditionally poured out in so many and varied ways. We also have the potential within ourselves to make way for Christ to manifest His light simply by opening up our hearts and minds to Him. We are called, like all Jesus’ disciples to walk in God’s ways and delight in His will. By allowing the presence of the living Christ to enter into our lives we not only enable the transformation of ourselves but we see spiritually the transformation of others as well.

Lives that have once been overshadowed by the presence of darkness, despair, fear, pain, alienation and grief have been renewed, healed, given new hope, when our spiritual eyes have been opened. Spirituality becomes real on the journey when the *call* to ministry and service are proclaimed and celebrated. Opening up our eyes to Christ is the job of every Christian person. Believe me, it is a life-long process, often difficult, but having the promise of fulfillment and inner peace.

One of the most important duties of every Christian is to pay attention to our health: our bodies as well as our minds and souls. And so it is that I go for an eye examination every

year to check out my vision. My doctor informs me that my eyesight is quite good, normal with corrective lenses and that there is nothing to worry about. He told me that the vision, in a reassuring way is even good enough for me to “see through people.” Ha! So much for humor.

What spiritual vision means is that we not only *see*, that is, understand ourselves, but *see* other people in a way we believe Christ sees and understands them. This vision includes, difficult people whose attitudes and behavior is experienced quite different from our own.

Our eyes are often dulled, even willingly blinded by prejudice, misunderstanding, and sometimes a lack of knowledge which inhibits us to truly understand people in a way that would be distinctively compassionate, caring and loving. Christian spiritual vision enables to open up the blindness within ourselves and focus on seeing people through the eyes of God. This is the message of Epiphany; the joy of God in man made manifest. God calls people to vision Himself. Recall the call of Samuel in the Old Testament Lesson.

The point of all that I have tried to say is that God calls you and me into a wonderful relationship. Like the disciples, like the call of Phillip and Nathaniel in today’s Gospel, this call is personal, and at the same time communal or corporate. We are called into a community of faith, the Church that is the living body of Christ. Jesus sees you and me as individual persons, unconditional loved and cared for, even when our vision grows dim. The bottom line is spelled out appropriately in a familiar hymn which we sung earlier in the service: These words enlightened our vision; they inspire our calling:

“Jesus calls us, o’re the tumult of our life’s wild, restless sea, day by day his clear voice soundeth, saying ‘Christian, follow me.’” Amen.

Cover: Duccio di Buoninsegna, *Calling of Peter and Andrew*, 1308-11

Tempera on wood, 43,5 x 46 cm

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