

Epiphany I

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[0 : 00] May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight. O Lord, our Rock and Redeemer, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Please be seated. When we think about Jesus, most of the time we think about divinity. We think about his current place in the heavens, sitting next to the Father. We think of him in the Eucharist, being the eternal word who nourishes our soul with his flesh and blood. When we think of Jesus, it is hard to picture in our mind someone who is like us. Our gospel text today shows Jesus in a very human situation, seemingly lost, and then being sought after by his mother, the Blessed Virgin, and his father, Saint Joseph.

I recall in my mind as a young child moments when I was at the grocery store with my mother and finding myself lost. I was scared because I did not know where she was.

[1 : 07] She quickly found me, and I was comforted. In this situation, however, Jesus is not the one who is scared because he is away from his earthly parents. He's staying behind at the temple for a greater purpose.

It can be easy for us to wonder why it is that Mary and Joseph did not know that Jesus was gone until after they had been traveling for a whole day. Back then, caravans did not always travel at the same pace.

Some would travel quicker, while others would travel at a slower pace. It would have been easy for either parent to believe that their son was with the other parent somewhere else along the journey. When they finally do realize that he was gone, they search everywhere, and they eventually found him in the temple three days later. When they found him, he was with the teachers in the temple, and they were amazed at the questions he asked and the answers he provided.

When Mary asked him why he stayed behind, he offered the very first words recorded from our Lord in the scriptures. Why did you seek me? Did you not know that I must be about my father's business?

[2 : 20] But just like many other times when Jesus teaches others, they did not understand what he meant. Afterward, Jesus returned home with his parents, and Mary kept all the things that Jesus said and did in her heart.

From then on, Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and men. Our gospel text today, along with the others, speaks of Jesus in ways that we aren't used to talking about him. Envisioning the eternal God in the heavens is easy because we can have any image in our minds when we think about him. Thinking of him in human terms is what makes things difficult. We know ourselves. We know our flaws and the difficult situations that we live in. Imagining the Son of God in the same flesh we have may feel sacrilegious. How is it that a holy God can become a man like me, a sinner?

The answer that we get from our Lord is the same answer of the blessed virgin God when she asked Jesus where he had been. Did you not know that I must be about my father's business?

[3 : 28] Jesus had taken on human nature perfectly, and that nature exists to be about the father's business. Human nature is not inherently sinful, even though it has been tainted by sin.

This is why the epistle to the Hebrews can say that Jesus was like us in all ways except sin. True humanity does not come about after the fall.

True humanity is exemplified in the person of Jesus. To go another step further, Jesus is the most human out of all people because of his dependence upon the Father's will.

Some people may wonder why Jesus' humanity is pressed so much. Careful! You don't want to talk too much about the humanity of Christ. People might forget that he is God.

I understand the concern. We don't want Jesus' humanity pressed so hard that we don't leave room for the eternal God. As Father Paul mentioned last week, a man named Arius did just that in the early church by teaching that Jesus was the first being that God created and then created the rest of the world through him.

[4 : 44] At the same time, two other heresies exist on the opposite side of Arianism, Docetism and Monophysitism.

Docetism taught that Jesus was only human in appearance but didn't have a human body. Monophysitism taught that Christ's human nature got swallowed up by the divine nature at the incarnation, making a new and single nature of Christ.

The root cause of these heresies was this teaching, some kind of denial of Christ's humanity. What's the big deal?

Why does it matter if we don't portray Christ's humanity? As the fathers of the church have taught, what Christ has not assumed, he has not redeemed.

Our Lord having a human nature is essential to his role of being the savior of mankind. Our gospel text helps us to see that our Lord has a human nature like us.

[5 : 51] Verse 52 reads, So, what does this require of us then?

We've already learned that Christ's human nature was essential for his role as the savior. Like the Blessed Virgin Mary, what should we keep in our hearts about these things?

I propose two things that are related to each other. Firstly, the general truth of Christ's humanity should remind us that Christ is like us because of the incarnation.

We can know that because of his human nature and because of his suffering as a human, he can aid us who also suffer and are tried in this life. He will be with us in all temptation and suffering, and he knows what it is like.

Christ has solidarity with us because he has become like us in all respects, as the book of Hebrews teaches us. Secondly, we learn from our gospel text what it means to be truly and completely human.

[7 : 28] Remember the very first words we have recorded of him. Why did you seek me? Did you not know that I must be about my father's business? Here we have displayed for us the reason why he has come to dwell with us, to obey the father's will, ultimately to be a sacrifice for humanity.

His humanity is displayed as complete obedience to the will of the father. Listen again to our collect for today. O Lord, we beseech thee mercifully to receive the prayers of thy people who call upon thee, and grant that they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfill the same.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord, amen. That we may perceive and know the things we are ought to do. What is it that we are ought to do? We are to be obedient to the will of the father by being human.

How do we do that? We enter into that perfect humanity of Jesus when we live the life of obedience and holiness that he lived when he lived here on earth.

Let us seek to live our lives not for ourselves, but as Christ did, in submission to the will of God. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

[8 : 47] Amen.