

Epiphany I

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Preacher: Fr. Paul Beutell

[0 : 00] And be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may be proved that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Worship this morning's epistle lesson in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. The world our Lord Jesus was born into was filled with turmoil and chaos.

Rome began its occupation of Judea in 63 B.C. when Pompey captured Jerusalem. Roman procurators or governors were given primary rule around 6 A.D. when Herod Archelaus was deposed.

Pilate was the fifth governor of the land. From 6 A.D. onward, the Herods were figurehead rulers, sort of like the Queen or King of England would be today.

The Roman occupation created great division within Judea. There were at least four factions amongst the Jewish people. One faction was friendly with Rome.

[1 : 11] A second just wanted to live peaceably and be able to practice their religion. The third wanted to overthrow the Roman occupiers and make Judea independent again.

The fourth, which included members of the Sanhedrin, weaved between the other three, taking every advantage they could in order to remain in power. With factions came the opportunity for turmoil and chaos.

Added to this was the Roman occupiers' duties in the region, which were to secure the land so that they could have a military outpost in the area, collect taxes for Caesar, and then keep the Jews in check.

All three of these caused great resentment amongst the Jewish people. Even the most peaceful-minded resented their pagan Roman occupiers. That is the world our Lord Jesus was born into.

Moreover, that is the world God decided was the right time, or as Galatians 4 states, at the fullness of time for Jesus to be born. Jesus was not born into the world at a time of peace, but a time of turmoil and chaos.

[2 : 34] And God knew it. We too live in a time of turmoil and chaos. And God knows it. I was born in 1963, so my entire lifetime has been lived in a country and a world wrought with it.

The turmoil and chaos we are experiencing these past ten or so months has been brewing throughout my lifetime, if not longer.

What it has created is a nation that has overthrown God, and in particular Jesus Christ, from schools, politics, media, and social discourse, and replaced him with agnosticism, atheism, humanism, and materialism.

Freedom has come to mean license to do whatever one wants. There is no clear American moral ethic, and today's American dream is to get as much stuff, accumulate as much money, and get as much out of this life for oneself as one can, even if it's at the expense of others.

Power, money, and unbridled sex are the unholy trinity of many. The church is divided into orthodox and heterodox, liberal and conservative, Protestant, Catholic, etc.

[4 : 06] Rome as an apostate pope. Many mainline churches preach a social gospel. Outside of the continuum, Anglicanism is nearly indefinable.

Evangelicals are succumbing to the woke culture. We are a people, a nation, and a church that is deeply divided into factions over social, political, religious, and now even health issues.

So-called common sense isn't so common any longer. Fear fuels the decision of many. Social and mainstream media stoke that fear and make the lines as jagged as possible to obscure truth, prevent civil conversation, and any possible unity.

This is the world that you and I live in. But God in his sovereign omniscience knows it. He knows that you and I would be living in a time like this.

He has called you and I to live in a time like this. So what are we to do? Seeing the state of the country, the world, and most importantly, the church.

[5 : 34] What do we need to remain faithful in the midst of the turmoil and chaos? The answer is wisdom.

We must gain as much wisdom as we can. Now when I speak of wisdom, I don't mean wisdom as the world defines it.

I mean true wisdom. The wisdom that comes from God alone. Proverbs 9, verse 10 states, The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

and the knowledge of the holy is understanding. If we are to navigate through the turmoil and chaos, we need to grow in wisdom.

And to grow in wisdom, we must do as St. Paul instructs us in this morning's epistle. We need to renew our minds. We need to get as much of the worldly clutter out of our minds as we can.

[6 : 39] And we need to fill them with holy knowledge. Philippians chapter 4, verse 8 states, Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue and if there be any praise, think on these things.

Does any of that describe Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, or YouTube? Does it describe any television network series, Netflix series, or blockbuster movie?

How about any network or cable news channel? as we turn those things off, or at least turn them way, way down, and think on these things, think on these virtues St. Paul lists, our minds will be renewed with wisdom.

Today's gospel lesson concludes this way. And Jesus' increase in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man.

I know it sounds odd, but Jesus grew in wisdom. Jesus was and is fully man. and as his human body grew in stature and his understanding of first century Jewish social life matured, so his wisdom increased.

[8 : 24] You and I need to increase in wisdom. To do so, we need to add specific things to our faith.

And St. Peter chapter 1 verses 5 through 8 tells us what they are. He writes, giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.

Then he adds in verse 8, for if these things are yours and abound, meaning they increase within us, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

As we add these seven things to our faith, and especially as they grow within our faith, our minds will be renewed and our wisdom and our wisdom will increase.

Colossians chapter 1 verses 9 through 14 is a prayer of St. Paul's. It speaks to the results that we will gain as we grow in wisdom. That we may be filled with the knowledge of God's will and all wisdom and spiritual understanding.

[9 : 53] that we may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.

Strengthened with all might according to His glorious power for all patience and long suffering with joy, giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.

He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of His Son. My brothers and sisters, I don't see the country, the world, or the church becoming any less tumultuous or chaotic any time soon.

It is possible things will get worse. And yet by holy baptism, lived out by faith, Jesus has qualified us for redemption in order to bring us into the kingdom of His Son, Jesus Christ.

He has given us His word to teach us, His church to guide us, and His sacraments to strengthen us. And if we keep them and we abound in them, they will deliver us through the turmoil and chaos to His eternal kingdom.

[11 : 21] The choice is ours to make. We have been given the grace to make it. We can be entangled in the turmoil and chaos of the world and lose sight of God, His love for us in Christ, and His sovereign, omniscient control of this world.

or we can emulate Jesus, step back from the chaos, and be led by grace to put forth the time and effort to add to our faith those things necessary to renew our minds and grow in wisdom.

Growth in wisdom, godly wisdom, is the antidote to turmoil and chaos. In the name of the Father, with the Son, and with the Holy Ghost.

Amen.