



Week after Epiphany

Peter Edmonds SJ

Peter Edmonds SJ reflects on the readings for the week after the Epiphany.

Monday: **Jesus's ministry begins**

1 John 3:22-4:6; Matthew 4:12-17, 23-25

He went around the whole of Galilee teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the Good News of the kingdom and curing all kinds of diseases and sickness among the people. (Matthew 4:23)



Great events in life are not over after a single day. Their memory persists, and colours incidents and happenings in the days that follow. And we see links with experiences that formerly seem unconnected. Likewise, in the gospel readings that follow the Feast of the [Epiphany](#), which celebrates how God revealed himself to the wise men in the form of a child, we contemplate other manifestations of God's goodness as we contemplate a variety of events in the life of Jesus.

Today we hear Matthew's account of the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus. He quotes a passage from Isaiah, because he is convinced that the words, persons and events related in Scripture found fulfilment in the life of Jesus. We hear of 'Galilee of the Gentiles', because, although Matthew is kn-

own as the 'Jewish' gospel, he makes clear, especially in his conclusion, that the mission of Jesus and his Church was to 'all the nations'. He sums this mission up under the three headings of teaching, proclaiming the kingdom and healing.

The description of Jesus which we hear today alerts us to the abundance of his teaching that we find in this gospel. Typical is the [Sermon on the Mount](#), which follows today's passage. In this, Jesus directs how life is to be lived in the kingdom that he proclaims. Jesus speaks within sight of a mass of suffering humanity. We pray that building on this glimpse of his person and activity, we may have eyes to see how the Risen Lord continues this mission of teaching, proclaiming and healing through his Church and ourselves in our own time.

Prayer

Lord, may our wounded world be alert to the teaching you offered and the healing you brought in gospel times. May we come to know and practise in our days the values of the kingdom which you proclaimed. We make this prayer through Christ our Lord.

Tuesday: **Jesus feeds 5000**

1 John 4:7-10; Mark 6:34-44

They all ate as much as they wanted. (Mark 6:42)

In this week following the Epiphany, we contemplate various manifestations of the Lord. Today, we listen to Mark's account of the feeding of the 5000. Mark is a gospel of detail, of mystery and paradox. Mark tells us that the crowd were like sheep without a shepherd, that the disciples did not know how much food was available, that the grass was green. As for mystery, what is going on here with 5000 men feeding on five loaves and two fish? We remember Moses feeding the crowds with manna and Elijah feeding 100 men with barley loaves. And as for paradox, why is there no reaction from the crowd? They are silent. There is contrast, too, because this feeding follows on from the banquet that king Herod gave, which ended with the Baptist's head on a dish.

Jesus is the main character. Mark is strong on the emotions of Jesus. Here he describes him as a person of compassion: his very guts are moved. His first response is to teach; then he tells his disciples to give the crowds something to eat themselves. He puts the crowds into groups and gives them food, as Moses and Elijah had done long before. He blesses and breaks the bread, just as the Church does in her Eucharist.

Here the voice of Jesus is manifest, a voice of compassion and authority, anxious for the welfare of leaderless crowds and the growth of his apostles in [discipleship](#). His is a voice speaking to us.

Prayer

Father, today help us listen to what Jesus says and watch what he does as he feeds the crowds. May we put ourselves in the company of his disciples as we join them in distributing the bread of life to the hungry of our world. Through Christ our Lord.

Wednesday: **Jesus walks on water**

1 John 4:8-11; Mark 6:45-52

'Courage! It is I! Do not be afraid!' (Mark 6:50)

Yesterday we heard from Mark's Gospel about the feeding of the 5000. The human Jesus dominated the narrative. At its beginning he was moved by compassion for the hungry crowds who were like sheep without a shepherd. Today, we learn how, when the 5000 had eaten and were satisfied, he went off into the hills to pray. His prayer here reminds us of his previous prayer in a lonely place 'a great while before day' after his healings in Capernaum and anticipates his later prayer in Gethsemane, reflecting the needs of his true humanity.

In his walking on the water which we hear today, his actions and words bring us into the world of the God we know from the Old Testament. Like that God, he walks on the water. 'He makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters', wrote Isaiah. The prophet Elijah was told to stand on the mountain, because the Lord was about to 'pass by'. Jesus meant to pass by his disciples as they struggled in their boat. Jesus tells his disciples: 'Courage! It is I! Do not be afraid!' 'It is I' is a translation of the 'I am', the name God gave himself when he appeared to Moses at the burning bush.

If the story of the feeding of the 5000 gives us sight of the human Jesus, the story of his walking on the water manifests Jesus at his most divine. When the wise men saw the child with his mother, they fell to their knees and 'worshipped him'. After all, this was the reason for their coming to Jerusalem in the first place.

Prayer

Father, it is easy for us to enjoy the Christmas story and that of the wise men on a level that is sentimental and superficial. Grant that with them we may recognise the newborn Jesus as a child to be worshipped as true God and true man. Through Christ our Lord.

Thursday: *First public words of Jesus*

1 John 4:19-5:4; Luke 4:14-22

'This text is being fulfilled today even as you listen.' (Luke 4:21)

Today we listen to Luke, as he relates the manifestation, the epiphany, of Jesus in the synagogue in Nazareth at the beginning of his ministry. Instead of the call to repentance and announcement of the kingdom of heaven which we heard from Matthew's Gospel, Luke offers us a lengthy quotation from Isaiah as the first public words of Jesus. Because the Spirit of the Lord has been given to him, he proclaims good news to the poor, liberty to captives, sight to the blind, freedom to the downtrodden. Our reading concludes: 'This text is being

fulfilled today even as you listen'. The public ministry of Jesus begins with Jesus in action as a prophet of God, as the two disciples on the road to Emmaus would recall in the last chapter of Luke when they spoke of Jesus as 'a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people'.

Other 'today' sayings in Luke deserve our attention. On Christmas Day we heard the message of the angel to the shepherds: 'Today has been born for you a saviour who is Christ the Lord'. As he approached Jerusalem, Jesus told Zacchaeus, the wealthy unpopular tax collector in Jericho, 'I must stay in your house today'. And as he died, he made a promise to the penitent criminal: 'Today you will be with me in paradise'.

Sadly the people in Nazareth rejected their today. They tried to kill Jesus by throwing him off a cliff outside their town. In contrast to shepherds in Bethlehem, a tax-collector in Jericho and a criminal in Jerusalem who accepted it, the people of Nazareth rejected the epiphany, the manifestation, of the mercy of God, offered to them in the ministry of Jesus. They make a sad contrast to the wise men from the East who worshipped on Epiphany Day.

Prayer

Father, we pray today that we may not be deaf to the voice of the Lord. Like the Christmas shepherds, Zacchaeus the tax collector and the penitent criminal on Calvary, may we welcome today the epiphany of the Lord in whatever form it is offered to us today. Through Christ our Lord.

Friday: *Jesus meets a leper*

1 John 5:5-13; Luke 5:12-16

Seeing Jesus, he fell on his face and implored him. (Luke 5:12)

Yesterday we experienced a self-epiphany of Jesus in the words of the prophet Isaiah; today we meet him manifested in action, confronted with a 'man covered with leprosy'. The scene is a city; we should be surprised to discover such a person there, since according to Jewish law, a 'leper' was condemned to a wilderness existence, banished from cities and human communities. This man addresses Jesus as 'Lord'. With courtesy, he begs Jesus to cleanse him from his disease.

According to the culture of the time, to touch such a person was to incur the uncleanness that afflicted the victim, yet this is what Jesus did. The man was immediately released from his leprosy. We recognise Jesus at work, manifesting good news for the poor and release for captives, as he had promised in the synagogue at Nazareth.

Yet if the beginning of the story indicates a break from the past, its conclusion is in continuity with it. The man is sent to the priest in order to meet the legal requirements that Moses prescribed. By such observance of the law, the man would be restored to ordinary life and could play his legitimate part in the life of the city and his community. Meanwhile Jesus himself leaves the city and goes off to the wilderness where lepers were meant to live. There, he took himself off to prayer, just as he had done before his baptism and will do again

before he summons the twelve whom he would name his apostles.

Prayer

Father, as we contemplate the story of the leper, help us to recognise the many different manifestations of your son and his mission in the gospels. May we find a place in our communities for the lepers and excluded of our own world. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Saturday: *The final witness of the Baptist*

1 John 5:14-21; John 3:22-30

'The bridegroom's friend, who stands there and listens.' (John 3:29)

In our final gospel reading in Christmas-tide, Jesus is silent. He is quietly at work baptising. In the religious atmosphere of the time, many religious groups, like the followers of John the Baptist, practised regular bathing and water rituals. The sectaries at Qumran in the Judean desert are the best known. We can still visit the ruins of their buildings, finally destroyed by the Roman armies.

We overhear in our gospel reading from John a discussion about purification which leads to John the Baptist making his longest speech in this gospel. He is exercising his regular role as a witness about Jesus. He has already denied that he himself was the Christ, Elijah or the prophet, but he witnesses to Jesus as the bridegroom and to himself as one who 'is glad when he hears the bridegroom's voice'. The prophets compared the relationship of God to his people as a husband married to his people.

Elsewhere in the gospels, Jesus, referring to himself, warned about the time when the bridegroom would be taken away. At the wedding feast of Cana, the bridegroom was commended for having kept the good wine until now. Jesus was the real bridegroom. In the Acts of the Apostles, we learn how at Ephesus, there were people who had been baptised into John's baptism who came to be baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus. This final gospel reading in Christmastide prepares us for the feast of the Baptism of Jesus, the first Sunday of the liturgical year.

Prayer

Father, today, thanks to John the Baptist, we enjoy a final manifestation, or epiphany, of Jesus as the bridegroom. May we join the Baptist in his joy and also in his prayer that, though he himself must grow smaller, Christ may grow greater. We make this prayer through Christ our Lord.