

Find God and you will find joy

By Bishop Milan Lach

On the first Sunday after Theophany, we read about Jesus' first public proclamation of the Gospel. He arrives as in the prophecy of Isaiah: "The people... in darkness have seen a great light" (9:2). In that moment, Jesus made known that he was the fulfillment of all prophecy. Then Jesus said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mt 4:17).

When Lent begins, we might be uncomfortable, for we don't understand what repentance is. In the Old Testament, sometimes it was taught that a person had to repent in order to earn salvation from God. But today's Gospel shows us a different view: God sends his Son Jesus Christ on this earth, to give us — everyone — salvation freely. We don't need to pay anything because Jesus Christ, with his Precious Blood on the cross, died and ransomed his life for the salvation of all people throughout history, from Adam and Eve to the last man at the end of the world.

What is necessary? That we accept it, that we receive this salvation freely. What is the problem? We don't believe it. How is it possible that salvation is free when, on this earth, we need to pay for everything? Nobody gives you anything for free in this world, and we think in the same way about God. But God is different. God so loved the world that he sent his only Son to be born in a stable, as the least among people. Through his humble birth, he showed us that he is close to the least among us and that everyone can be saved, no exception.

You do not need to be afraid. What do we need in this life? A career? Power? So much money so as to be independent? I don't think so, because in Jesus Christ we have everything. We don't need anything else. If we have salvation, if we have eternal life, this world will pass away, but we will remain forever with God. This is the joyful news of the Gospel.

When you find God, you will find peace, you will find joy, and your life will be changed. The people around you will notice a change, too. They will begin to ask you who you are, what is happening your life, why are you thinking differently from the world, and why career, money and power are not important to you.

The mission of our church is to preach the Word of God and to give and receive the Eucharist. In the history of Christianity, many churches were damaged during the persecution, but people preserved Jesus Christ in their hearts. Our hearts are the temple of God, not buildings or structures. Please do not forget this.

We need churches for gathering on Sunday, but we cannot consider that our churches are so important that we cannot live our faith without them. I can share with you my experience in the former Czechoslovakia, where our Greek Catholic people were not allowed to pray in our churches. You know where they prayed? At the cemeteries, in winter and in summer. The same was true in Romania and in Ukraine. Many of our faithful in this period prayed without churches.

But why and how did they preserve the faith? They preserved God in their heart, and I encourage you to do the same. Open your heart for God. Don't worry: he loves you, he wants you to be happy here, not just in heaven, but here; the heavenly kingdom begins here. We need to pray for this grace because it is not in our capacity to understand, to convert, to repent; it is only by the grace of God. So please, open your hearts, so that the grace of God can work and so that our hearts will be converted and we may have eternal life.

+Bishop Milan

Excerpt from the homily Bishop Lach delivered at the final Divine Liturgy at St. Eugene Parish Jan. 13.

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