

The Feast of Epiphany

Cycle C, 1.2.22

Isaiah 60:1-6/Ephesians 3:2-6/Matthew 2:1-12

Edwina Gateley is a poet, theologian, artist, writer, lay minister, modern-day mystic and prophet, and a single mom. She gives talks, conferences and retreats in the United States, as well as internationally; one of her ministries has been reaching out to women in recovery from drugs and prostitution. She tells an Epiphany story that I wanted to share with you on this feast.

The Epiphany celebrates the journey of the Magi bringing gifts in recognition of the Incarnation — the coming of Christ into our world. “Epiphany” is derived from a Greek word meaning revelation or an intuitive grasp of a new reality. The magi experienced this consciousness of mystery in the birth of Christ. Such insights change one’s perception of reality forever. As did Edwina’s encounter with an old street wino.



He was dirty and he smelled. She almost tripped over him lying on the sidewalk — drunk as a skunk and “out of it” as they say. Her religious tradition had taught her to see Jesus in everyone. But this was a bit much. There was not a shred of revelation or glory or good news at her feet. She didn’t even think of trying to do anything for Mark, who was clearly past any hope of transformation. But, over the years, she got to know and befriend the old wino. Beneath all his external diminishment there

eventually emerged a gentle soul — it was like finding a diamond in a dung heap. Whenever Mark knew that she was going to be out on the streets doing out-reach to the women in prostitution, he would go to the Salvation Army, shower, shave, change clothes, and not take a drink that day. He would then accompany her on her street walks like a respectable co-minister!

As time went by, Mark joined her in visiting friends who lived in a small Christian community in the countryside. He loved the forest and the small wild animals, he listened in awe to the song of the birds and was delighted at the movements of tiny insects and bugs. Mark, the wino, made her think of St. Francis Assisi.



One day, walking through the forest, Edwina noticed a table leg sticking out from beneath the under-growth. It had probably been abandoned years ago and was overgrown with wild bushes and brambles. But she observed carvings on the legs of the table like grapes and vine leaves, and she knew that once it must have been quite beautiful. Mark helped her pull the table from beneath the bushes and carried it up to the garage. It stood — large and painted red. But she could see the carvings on the legs.

“I’ll fix it,” declared Mark. With a piece of broken glass, he began to scrape. Beneath the red paint was green paint. And the old man scraped. Beneath the green paint was brown paint. And the old man scraped. For six months he scraped. Until one day, there

it was — a beautiful antique oak carved table in all its original natural beauty. Mark stood by the table. And she felt God say: “The table is Mark, and Mark is the table.”



For her it was an epiphany — a revelation of something beautiful and true beneath a reality of external diminishment. It was a new perception. Mark stayed with Edwina and her Christian community for over three years before moving back into the inner city to live in a transient hotel. They remained good friends, and he continued to visit their community for vacations and holidays. One day, when she was out of the country, she received a phone call from Chicago informing her that Mark had been found dead in his room. He died of a heart attack. In his hand they found a scribbled note: “*Next of kin – Edwina.*”

Returning to Chicago, she went to the funeral home where Mark lay in his coffin. He was wearing a pin striped suit with a kerchief. She asked the funeral director, “Where did he get that? He’s never had a suit in his life!” “That,” declared the funeral director, “is my best suit. I knew who he was — I knew he was your brother. I knew he was special. So I put my best suit on him.” Edwina stood by the body of “the old street wino” — now her brother and next of kin — and she heard God say: “This is My beloved son...”

Indeed. That is what the Epiphany is all about. It is about the recognition of the divine in our world and in each one of us. The three kings recognized the divinity in Christ and celebrated that awareness — bringing gifts. We are all called to celebrate Epiphany, to recognize the divine presence in all and to acknowledge that we are all sons and daughters of God — “next of kin.” During a holiday dinner, I had a conversation with Steve, a friend of mine, who is retiring from his position as Chief Operating Officer of an organization called **JobTrain** in Marin County. The non-profit outreach program transforms lives and communities in Silicon Valley. They help many people there who are most in need reclaim their lives from poverty and unemployment by preparing them for successful, sustainable careers in high-demand and emerging field. In 2020 the organization trained and placed 2500 people in successful jobs.

Finding Steve’s replacement as he retires involves a hiring process that all of you in the corporate world or any form of administration are quite familiar with. The search process is guided by three principles – Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. Steve’s organization has added a fourth guiding principle - Belonging. For many, adhering to the process is challenging, yet these are gospel values that our Epiphany story makes evident. *In Christ there in neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female... for all are one.* One author compares the principles to a dance: **Diversity** is where everyone is invited to the party. **Inclusion** means that everyone gets to contribute to the playlist. **Equity** means that everyone has the opportunity to dance.

As we follow the journey of the Magi which led them to Christ, and as each of us welcomes in the New Year after celebrating the birth of Jesus, it can be a time for us to

reevaluate and find the places in our lives where we can make room for God and others. We can easily forget that God does not put conditions on loving us. All God asks of us is that we try. The end of the old year and the beginning of a new year is the perfect time to remember the best gift we received this Christmas: the love God has for each of us. We can try to love others and make room for others, the way God has made room for us.



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