

Epiphany I

Romans 12: 1-5 & Luke 2: 41-52

This week, I met a nurse who told me that he was sad and depressed because the holiday is over, she spent all her money to please her family and friends, the weather is not good, everywhere is gloomy, and that really doesn't like this time of the year. My reaction to her was that we just celebrated Christmas when Christ revealed himself to the Jews; and we just celebrated Epiphany when He revealed himself to the Gentiles! The whole world now has the revelation of God made flesh to dwell among us. We need to celebrate and keep the feast on, regardless of our circumstances. Emmanuel, the Lord is with us!

This reminds me of a book written by Jessica Brodie, a famous Christian writer. The title of that book was "Back in the Saddle." In that book, Jessica stated that "when we conform to the world, we agree with it and walk in its ways. Anything not of God is of the world..."

It's tempting to get sucked into all the good things this world seems to offer; from the people we love to the splendor before our eyes. It is easy to get busy with the things of this world. Some people think that there is no other reality beyond what they see and feel. That's why many of us are engaged in the wrong battles. Today, in the Epistle, St Paul is telling us that everything we see is temporary. The world is temporary, and those who chase after its pleasures and treasures can too easily fall to its illusion and turn from what really matters: God and his holy kingdom.

"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind..."

What does that really mean? And why is "the world" so bad?

The term "world" is not what God created, but it is what we have made that creation to be. Here, Paul is referring to the philosophies and perspectives that go against the kingdom of God.

On one hand, God's kingdom calls us to put God first, to put others before ourselves, and to walk in honor, respect, and obedience to him and his ways. But, on the other hand, the world calls us to something different. It tells us to play the game of life, to be the center of the universe, to be famous, to enjoy life, to fight for our rights, to get whatever we want right here and right now (*hic et nunc*). The love of the world! It's bad!

Why is it wrong to love the world?

I know that some things in the world are good – our families, our friends, those we like to spend time with, our church and its people, America and the people living in it. But the Bible tells us, repeatedly, to turn away from the world and fix our eyes upon Jesus. St John, the Apostle, said this: "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love for the Father is not in them" (1 John 2: 15).

That means setting aside our selfish desires and to put God above all. In Matthew 6: 33, Jesus tells us to “seek first his kingdom and his righteousness” and not to worry about the concerns of the body. He also says we should not store up for ourselves temporary “treasures on earth, where moths and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal,” but store up treasures in heaven (Matthew 6: 19-20). What makes the world “bad” are all the passions, the cares, and the concerns that people pursue or run after. We are to focus on our eternal life in heaven with the Father.

We cannot focus on both. Jesus warns us: “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money (Matthew 6: 24).

How can we be a sacrifice pleasing to God?

Our God wants us to lay ourselves aside daily, dedicating ourselves to him and living his way of life. Here at St Alban’s, it means that every one of us must be committed and involved in the life of the church. Everybody must have or find something to do in this part of the kingdom of God. Our common project this year is evangelism. Everything that we do must contribute to working on that project.

Rather than giving our physical life as a one-time offering (like an animal at Jerusalem's temple), we, members of this church, must offer ourselves daily to serve God and love our fellow men. We should not be doing things based on our own self-centered will or to please ourselves, or to please anybody, but God.

We are to be focused on benefitting and blessing others by living the way of God as defined in the Bible (Hebrews 10:20). As we sacrifice ourselves in this way, each day, we become more and more like Jesus (Matthew 5:48).

Prayer

Father God, today, we choose to put you first here at St Alban’s. We acknowledge that without you, we can do nothing. We invite you to have your way in our lives as we seek you first in all that we do. Through Christ our Lord. Amen!