

Sunday: Epiphany, Cycle C, 1.3.16  
Scripture: Is 60:1-6/Eph 3:2-3,5-6/Mt 2:1-12

## ENCOUNTERING THE LIVING GOD EACH DAY

A touching story was related on MSNBC news about a young woman named Brenda. When Brenda graduated from high school, her mom and dad gave her a special copy of the Dr. Seuss classic - *Oh, The Places You'll Go*. Brenda loved the book as a child - but this was something much more. "Open it up," her parents said. On the first page was a paragraph written by Brenda's kindergarten teacher. And as she turned each page, Brenda read notes and remembrances written by every teacher she had in elementary and high school.



At the end of every school year for the past 13 years, Brenda's dad asked one of her teachers, principals or coaches to write something about her in the book. All of them happily did so. Brenda had no idea what her father was up to. The book had the intended effect, Brenda wrote. *"I burst out in tears. Sitting there reading though this book, there are encouraging and sweet words from every teacher and mentor I love and remember through my years of schooling in this small town.*

*"It is astounding to receive something this moving, touching, nostalgic and thoughtful. I can't express*

*how much I love my dad for this labor of love."* Brenda's dad turned a simple children's book into the gift of a lifetime. Each note in Brenda's book was a moment of epiphany: a manifestation of God's loving presence in the school experience of young Brenda. Our own journeys are filled with such epiphanies - markers of God's compassion and peace in the love and generosity of family and friends, of teachers and coaches, of mentors and neighbors. In both times of great joy and accomplishment, of turmoil and disappointment, the love of God is manifested to us in the most hidden kindnesses, in the barely visible light.

Like the Magi, we need to search – to keep our eyes on the signs of that love and grace which surround us, on the “epiphanies” which we encounter each day. Once at a New Year’s celebration with a group of friends, we took the time to share something memorable from the Christmas Season – an encounter or occurrence which was surprising and unexpected, or significant and moving. One dad beamed with pride as he passed his iPhone with photos of his baby daughter only a few months old, delighting us all in the gift of pure innocence and new life. While on a family holiday vacation, another friend’s little son gave his favorite toy truck away to another little boy who had very little. The burst of generosity and compassion coming from a child so young inspired that mom.

Another guest talked about receiving a gift from his oldest son, a grown-up son not prone to extravagant giving or thoughtfulness toward others. That might not seem like anything unusual, except that the family had decided to draw names for their gift exchange, but this son decided to give a

gift to each person – out of character, but certainly in season during this season of giving. Another guest recounted a graceful and grace-filled conversation with her father, who is not the easiest person, yet on Christmas, he rose to the occasion. One mom beamed with pride and surprise because her daughter had filled their house with her teenage friends on New Year's Eve, a sign that mother and daughter were still connected and enjoyed each other's company – sometimes a rare experience for parents of teens.

The best story that was shared was about an elderly woman here at Christmas Mass who was asked by the family sitting next to her in church what she was doing for Christmas. When the reply came that the woman had no relatives around and she would be alone on Christmas, the family, without hesitation, insisted that she would be a guest in their home for dinner and their holiday festivities. We never know what surprises God intends for us as we turn the corner. These unexpected gifts can be wonderful in their generous hopes, fearful in the personal demands. They come into our family and share the secrets of our life. Yet they enable us to reach outward, to see visions and to perform wonders. They introduce us to new kinds of music and art, to unexpected joys and entertainment, to serious discussions and profound insights, to opportunities of helping others and being assisted by others, to new sensitivities to the needs of others.

These are the signals God throws our way every day to remind us of his constant presence. We should pay attention to those important signals by which people try to break down the barriers – signals of forgiveness, signals of hope and kindness, signals of needs

and desires. These are like the star and the dream which led the Magi to Jesus. If Jerusalem had known well the prophecy of Isaiah, then it would have been prepared by this signal that God wanted the gentiles to be co-heirs with them, that all men and women, all boys and girls must eventually belong to one family, God's family which is our very own.

In one of her several books, *You Learn by Living: Eleven Keys for a More Fulfilling Life*, Eleanor Roosevelt advised, “Approach each new person you meet with a spirit of adventure. Try to discover how they think and feel; try to learn about their background, the soil in which their roots have grown, the customs, beliefs and ideas which have shaped their thinking. If you care enough to make the effort, you can establish an understanding relationship with people who are entirely outside your orbit.” Mrs. Roosevelt's advice echoes the prophet Isaiah who wished to kindle in his contemporaries a spirit of openness. By cultivating such an attitude, they would more readily appreciate the universal concerns of God.



In this new year, let's continue our own journey to find Christ in our daily lives, following the star of God's reconciliation and justice, enabling us to behold Emmanuel - God in our midst - in every experience of love, consolation, understanding and forgiveness -- whether given or received.

*Fr. John Kasper, OSFS*