

Matt's Message for the Season of Epiphany: The Truth Must Dazzle Gradually

Today had that perfect January sunset. It has to be a very cold day and it was. The colder the day, the clearer the sky. Before dawn the stars and the last quarter moon were extremely bright. When the sun finally rose in the southeast, it was pure and cloudless, white light, with hardly any warmth, but lots of illumination. The sun quickly scurried across the southern sky into the west and by 3 you could see it starting to set.

Then it turned into that perfect January sunset. The sun turns orange as it nears the horizon, but it stays very bright for a while. The leafless trees look amazing with that orange sun behind it. With the light behind the trees, you see their shape clearly. They almost appear two-dimensional: stark, black, sculpted forms of beauty, each one completely unique. The observer can't help feeling that a winter tree is much more beautiful than a tree covered in leaves. Each branch shows the skill and wisdom of the Creator. Each twig contributes to the complete shape of the tree, as it stands motionless in the last light. A tree covered in leaves is just a big blob. January in Canada is where real beauty happens.

Then the white fields start turning orange where the sun still hits it and blue in the shadows of the hills. The shape of the drifts along the fence lines stands out clearly in light and darkness. Most of all, I love how the sun looks when it is a distinct, bright, orange ball seen through the bare branches. Then the light is like liquid gold, spilling through the woods.

When the orange sun has gone down, the long, cozy winter evening begins, perfect for reading long, long, long books about adventure, history, fantasy, or mysticism.

This is what the evenings in Canada are often like during the Season of Epiphany. During Epiphany, the light is growing; the days are getting longer. The days are cold and short, but each day is longer than the last one. I'm already noticing it. I barely have to have my forklift headlights on in the morning. The light is growing, day by day.

Interestingly, that's exactly what the Season of Epiphany is like theologically. Christ is spiritual light. Throughout Epiphany, we slowly, gradually see him more and more clearly. The Season of Epiphany begins when he is a child at the Feast of Epiphany, on January 6th. It ends with the Transfiguration, just before Ash Wednesday, when he is seen as he truly is: the eternal Son of God. Throughout January and February, the light of Christ is slowly growing in the Church, just as the natural light is growing. So the light outside us is growing, and the light inside us is growing as well, as we leave behind our darkness and ignorance more and more.

The light comes back to the earth slowly. I'm sure we wish May would just suddenly be here, but that's not how reality works. In the same way, we can only understand Christ

slowly. Christ is a mystery that cannot be understood in a few sentences, or a few days, or a few months, or a few years. The liturgy of the Church year cycles, telling the same stories again and again, just as the natural year cycles, showing us the exact same things again and again. The Church and nature don't change much. But each year finds us a different person. This year I'm enjoying the leafless trees more than I ever have before. I've never noticed how I see their shape more clearly when they appear more two-dimensional. As we get older, everything changes because we become more and more able to see beauty as we age. Every time winter comes, it's different because I am different every year.

In the same way, the events of Christ's life appear different to me every year. This year, when I heard about Jesus turning the water into wine, I found myself thinking about why he had to be encouraged to do it by his mother. Mary basically painted him into a corner so he had to perform his first miracle. Why? Had he been hesitating too long, not starting his public ministry when Mary knew he was ready to? Did he need a push from his mother? How did she know he could perform miracles? Why was she so concerned that the wedding feast had run out of wine? Why is the Second Person of the Trinity, the Eternal Word, the Son of God, allowing his mom to push him around? As I age, I see these old miracles from a different angle. I ask new questions that I can't answer. I'm slowly, gradually learning more and more about the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Maybe I wish it wasn't taking so long. I wish I could just be wise suddenly. I wish I wasn't taking so many wrong turns. Maybe I wish God would just appear to me and answer all my questions. But, for whatever reason, the truth comes to me slowly. My transformation takes a lifetime. I'll only be finished growing when I breathe my last breath.

That's why the liturgical year happens again and again and again and again. There's no exhausting these mysteries. Our minds never reach a point where we simply can't grow any more. There's no glass ceiling when it comes to the expansion of the mind. We can choose to stop becoming wiser, but we don't have to.

Why does it take so long to grow and learn? Why can't we just understand quickly? To answer these questions, I'm simply going to leave you with a poem by my favourite American poet: Emily Dickenson:

Tell all the truth but tell it slant —
Success in Circuit lies
Too bright for our infirm Delight
The Truth's superb surprise
As Lightning to the Children eased
With explanation kind
The Truth must dazzle gradually
Or every man be blind.

Every cold January day, the light is increasing. The days are getting slightly longer every day. The sun rises and sets quite quickly, but it's still very beautiful in its own way.

In our hearts, the light can also grow. We wonder why it takes so long for the spring to come. We wonder why it takes so long for us to understand the deepest mysteries of God and life. The Truth must dazzle gradually.

As we allow ourselves to grow and deepen and expand and come alive, every day brings us closer to the "superb surprise." Whatever that is!

Happy January to you all!!