

## Epiphany - Year C - 2007 - Is.60:1-6; Mt 2:1-12

1. Back in the early 1990's a Broadway play which dealt with the AIDS epidemic made its debut. Although AIDS was still a taboo subject to many, the fact that a play was dealing with it was not all that ground breaking.
  2. However when I saw this play, ANGELS IN AMERICA, on HBO in 2004,
    - a. While I expected it to deal with politics and morals, and it did.
    - b. what I did not expect this story, to deal with, which is about the lives of a group of people, two of whom are dying of AIDS, was theology.
    - c. Seeing one man with AIDS, the infamous ROY COHN
      - i. as the personification of evil,
    - d. And the other a man named Prior Walter
    - e. as a prophet, given a message by an Angel.
    - f. The message was a simple one: STOP! Stop growing; stop moving; stop changing.
    - g. Stop! Because if we continue
      - i. the world will only get worse;
    - h. Stop! because if we continue
      - i. everything will be lost.
  3. Of course the angel's warning had to do with AIDS and has been eerily prophetic;
    - a. for in 2006
      - i. there were 40 million people infected worldwide,
      - ii. and over 20 million people have died.
  4. And yet we do not have to think about AIDS
    - a. to hear the fear at the heart of the angel's warning.
    - b. for look at everything that has happened in the first six years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century;
    - c. The rise of militant Islam,
    - d. the terrorist attacks of 9/11 here in America, 7/7 in London and 3/11 in Madrid,
    - e. the countless other suicide bombings and acts of terror throughout the world;
    - f. And from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, to the Patriot Act and restrictions on our constitutional rights at home,
      - i. everything we do to "fix" things seems only to make it worse.
  5. The WORLD has CHANGED; and all we have to do is look west
    - a. And see the gaping hole in our city's skyline
      - i. to be reminded of all that has been lost.
  6. **For the people of Zion**, that reminder and that fear was just as close as it is for us;
    - a. All they had to do is look out their windows, to see ruin of their city Jerusalem, and the gaping hole at its heart, where their temple had once stood.
  7. They had begun to return to their city after a generation of exile in Babylon,
    - a. buoyed by the promise that when they arrived they would find
      - i. a wealthy and radiant city, restored by God.
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- b. But what they found was what their parents left a generation before;

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- i. a destroyed city, abandoned by God.
8. **For the people of Judea**, centuries later, their reminder was not a thing, but a person; a king, named Herod.
  - a. As King of Judah, he should have been the one leading them into that wealthy and radiant future,
    - i. which after all these years they had yet to find.
  - b. But instead he was Rome's puppet, continuing the cruel oppression
  - c. They had experienced for centuries.
9. It would be tempting to think that whether we are
  - a. in America in the 21<sup>st</sup> century,
  - b. Judea in the 1<sup>st</sup> century
  - c. or Zion six hundred years earlier
  - d. the Angel's message in *Angels in America* was meant for all of us;
    - i. STOP changing; for change means destruction and death.
10. And yet when Pryor Walter tried to preach this message in the play; he could not,
  - a. because he sees something that truly makes him a prophet for us;
  - b. The same something that another prophet, the one who wrote the words we hear in this morning's first reading saw. And that is
    - i. that to STOP change is the very definition of what it means to DIE.
    - ii. And thus CHANGE means, not death, but LIFE.
11. For the prophet in that first reading,
  - a. CHANGE MEANT seeing all the NEW people who were beginning to come to Jerusalem: the gentiles, the foreigners, the strangers,
    - i. bringing THEIR talents and THEIR riches
      - (1) because they saw in Jerusalem and its God the fulfilment of their hopes,
    - ii. As bringing a change that would not DESTROY but RENEW their people.
    - iii. And fulfill the promises that brought them back to Jerusalem in the first place; but fulfill them in a new way.
12. For Matthew
  - a. Change meant seeing the gentiles, the foreigners the strangers,
    - i. Symbolized by those kings coming from the east,
    - ii. bringing THEIR talents
      - (1) symbolized by the fact that they are called MAGI, or wise ones,
    - iii. Bringing their RICHES
      - (1) symbolized the gold frankincense and Myrrh,
    - iv. Laying these gifts and talents
      - (1) not at the feet of a child of old king Herod,
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      - (2) but at the feet of Jesus

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- (a) who would bring a change that would NOT destroy but RENEW Israel,
  - (b) by including these new people, the gentiles, into God's people and thus fulfill their old hopes in a new way.
- 13. And for us, what does change mean for us?
  - i. You might ask me, Fr. Baker, "What is all this talk about change? Are we facing a change?"
  - ii. Of course we are. We always are. Because we are a living parish, a growing parish, and that means change. We cannot choose NOT to change;
- b. Because if there is one message any of can take into this new year from
  - i. the Gospel,
  - ii. the first reading,
  - iii. and if you have seen it, *Angels in America*,
  - iv. is that not to change is to die;
    - (1) as an individual, as a nation, or as a church.
- c. But there is another message we can take with us into this new year;
  - i. one from the feast day we celebrate today.
- 14. Epiphany is an ancient festival and over the centuries it has changed;
  - a. originally it was the celebration of Jesus birth,
  - b. then for a time the celebration of Jesus' baptism,
  - c. and then finally that of the coming of the Magi.
- 15. However, in all those changes the central meaning of the feast has remained the same;
  - a. it celebrates Jesus' *epiphany* or appearance; on the world stage, if you will;
    - i. as a baby in Bethlehem,
    - ii. at his baptism,
    - iii. or in the coming of the Gentiles to believe in him. All of them different yet all of them moments in which the one Jesus makes his appearance.
  - b. the moments and the means he chooses to reveal himself change
    - i. But Jesus and his message remain the same.
      - (1) He does not change, even when we have to;
      - (2) and thus he is with us, always using change
        - (a) not to destroy us, but to renew us,
        - (b) making us into the people he calls us to be;
        - (c) the people he promised us we would be;
        - (d) his people; his church.