

1 Epiphany – Year B – January 14, 2009 - Homily
Genesis 1:1-5; Psalm 29; Acts 19:1-7; Mark 1:4-11
Susan E. Wilmot

As important as silence is in connecting with God in prayer and meditation, I love music as an aspect of our worship and adoration of the Lord. My favorite image of our universe as God's creation is musical. There are chords, harmonies, voices singing together, sometimes off beat, sometimes loud, soft, allegro or andante, sometimes discordant, but each resonating with life and the unmistakable imprint of our Master and maestro. Music is a kind of universal language, mathematical in its structure, but so much richer than the ones and zeroes of basic binary code that frankly leave me cold.

There is a great deal of harmony in the readings for this week. That is the resonating voice of God echoing and ringing out truth to many different people across vast time differences. The beginning of all creation is portrayed for us in the words of Genesis, and in the first words that God speaks. This is especially relevant in this season of Epiphany, and as we recall the Light of the world being revealed to the world in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Of course, we are meant to make the connection between the beginning described in Genesis and the new beginning described in the Gospel. We can hear the beat and melody echo into the Gospel reading where Jesus comes to be baptized, and receives a new name, for another new beginning in the history of salvation. In the Psalm, we hear about the mighty voice of the Lord, powerful enough to break the cedars of Lebanon, split the flames of fire, shake the wilderness, and make the oak trees writhe. Then in the reading from Mark, we are privileged to hear God words to the Word made flesh – a voice from heaven. Let us not neglect God's symphonic theme that enfolds each person of the Trinity: the wind of God in Genesis, the Holy Spirit coming down on the newly baptized in the reading from Acts, and, of course, on Jesus in the form of a dove at His own baptism.

The gifts of God are evident in the effects of the Spirit working in us. "The Lord shall give strength to his people; the Lord shall give his people the blessing of peace," sings the Psalmist. Whereas God's children in Ephesus receive the Holy Spirit and then speak in tongues and prophesy. In the part of Mark's gospel immediately following this passage, we learn that the Spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted. This is a critical point! The Holy Spirit is described variously as the breathe or wind of God, advocate, comforter, or teacher of truth. She is most often known to us as a still small voice, yet also resembles a tongue of fire, a flame, or the dove of peace and new life. It is the Holy Spirit that stirs us to action and growth. Jesus baptizes us with the gift of the Holy Spirit. Our preparation for Christian baptism is the baptism of repentance preached and practiced by John.

In the Episcopal and Lutheran traditions, as in many others, baptism is a one-time event, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. During baptism, we are named, claimed as God's sons and daughters, sealed and marked as Christ's own forever, in a way that is unrepeatable. No double dipping, we might say! And that brings us to the reading from Acts, where it appears that some disciples of Jesus in Ephesus are baptized twice. In truth, the baptism of repentance that John proclaimed simply tells the recipients to believe in the one who was to come after him. When Paul baptizes them in the name of Jesus, they each receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, just as Jesus Himself did at His own baptism. As we mentioned earlier, the Holy Spirit has an immediate charismatic effect in the newly baptized. You and I are also blessed with gifts of the Spirit. Part of our life in Christ is to discern these gifts, develop them, and share them for the purpose of building up the Body that is the church.

Our faith in action is how we are using our God-given gifts in service to God and this

community. But how would we know what God desires for us, especially if we have been baptized as infants or young children? We baptize infants and children, to recognize that they too are members of Christ's Body, and included in the blessings of redemption that Jesus gave for us in the new covenant. All baptismal candidates, young and old, have sponsors. For infants, it is the responsibility of parents and Godparents to bring up the newly baptized in a Christian home, to join in fellowship with a Christian community, to know Christ, and to follow Him. For older candidates, the same applies! Our role as Godparents should be to share our own faith, offer encouragement and mentorship in helping our Godchildren to live into their Baptismal vows, and grow in love and service to our Lord.

I have shared with some of you that I began to write to my Godson, John-Eric before he was born, and have written regularly to him since then. Even though he lives many miles away, his Mom and Dad take him to church regularly. I know that he is learning about God and how to love his neighbors through their example within a community of faith. A beautiful article by David Wells tells how Godparents should always be prepared to remind their Godchildren about the song placed in our hearts at baptism. The song has three important lines. The first is that, heaven is open to you. That means, "[T]here is no limit to God's purpose for your life". The second is that God's Spirit is in you. Wells reminds us that as a temple of God's Holy Spirit, this is where others will encounter the face of Christ, both individually, and as we share in the community of God's family of faith. The third line to remember is "you mean everything to God". In the same way that God declares Jesus as His "beloved" – you are also God's beloved son or daughter. You are of infinite value and worth, and so in our baptismal vows we promise to "respect the dignity of every human being". As we enjoy this season of light, and listen to the song of Baptism in our own hearts, God invites us to a deeper harmony through all our relationships. What note do you add to God's beautiful symphony? Do you want to change your tune on anything in your life or relationships? How will you help another to hear God's cosmic song of love, grace and peace?

Something to think to about.

Amen.