

30th December 2020 - All Things Come Together Under His Feet – Wednesdays Prayer Meeting

As we come together, today is the last Wednesday prayer meeting of 2020. We are grateful that we have been able to have the meeting continuously through the pandemic and through various situations. Normally at the end of the year and also at the beginning of the next year, the feast of our Blessed Mother comes -- Mary, mother of God -- and invariably we preach on her. Last year the sermon we preached on Mary, Mother of God and I found many people coming back to me and giving me feedback on how the theology of Mary had been enriched by reflecting on what we shared. So this year we will not be doing that. If you want the theology of Mary, Mother of God you can go to January 1st 2020 prayer meeting and you'll find it there. Every January 1st is the feast of Mary, Mother of God.

Today I'm going to preach a theme that we have not preached before because in the first week we have this major feast. In the first Sunday of the year we have the feast called Epiphany. When I was preaching the sinhala message yesterday I realized they have taken away the word epiphany and they have used 'The Three Kings'. I think we have missed the major concept of the Church. The word Epiphany means a sudden manifestation of God, a remarkable revelation of God. People say, "I had an epiphany." That means, I had this revelation from God. God was revealed to me. I had a moment of epiphany. In the same way we have this feast of Epiphany and it is to do with the revelation of God in the manger. I thought if I don't preach it it will be a shame because it is a beautiful direction given to us by the Church.

So the theme of today, while we focus on the Feast of Epiphany, is: All Things Come Together at His Feet. I thought it's a beautiful theme we can reflect deeply on. Remember, where is He? He is in the manger and he is in the stable. We have the Kings or the Wise Men visiting him. All things come together at His feet is the peace. So to come to the manger we have to go back a few billion years. From there we start and we come to the manger that sheds light on everything in our lives.

I start with a question: What was the dream of God when He created us? What do you think He was thinking when He created us, when He created humanity, when He designed the universe? Today most scientists agree that how the Bible says it is how it happened - the Big Bang. It exploded and things came into creation. I was listening to this explanation of creation by scientists and this lady who was talking from a faith perspective but also a scientist said it beautifully. She said that up to 70 years ago, if anyone said the world was created, every scientist would have laughed them off the stage because everyone thought the universe was eternal, that it was a process that had existed without any concept of time and that it existed forever. Most scientists were agreed on that. Then the Big Bang concept came and today they are all agreed that from a moment called a singularity, everything exploded into creation.

So we know that there is intelligent creation, God designed it. When God designed it, we ask Him the question: What was in your mind, what was in your heart when you created this? It's so important for us to have a light in our world, to have a light in our own lives. What was God's dream? To find that we go to the book of Genesis. We start from there:

Genesis 1:26

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness..."

We have a revelation. Humanity is made in the image of God. They say the difference between us as the chimpanzees is two chromosomes. That's why some people behave like them, specially after Christmas and New Year celebrations. Sometimes chimpanzees are better. But still we are a world apart from them

even though we are only two chromosomes different. The Bible would say the reason is we are created in the image of God. Because God is Spirit and God is not having a nose and a mouth and a face (of course God has a face in Jesus Christ but I'm saying God as God) since God doesn't have that we can say that the uniqueness of God which He has given to us is a spirit, a human spirit. We have a human spirit. When I pray these days, I know I'm getting older so I say, "Lord I have come from your heart and I am returning to you soon. When I return I am coming to the fullness and the completion of all the longing of my heart." I put it down in terms of technology and I say, "This year we discovered a processor that was not in existence a year ago, with such wonder for people in technology." Apple has released a processor called the M1 processor that supersedes everything else. Everyone is amazed by it. I'm thinking, what kind of technology you must be having in heaven waiting for us. You begin to realise, we are in this beautiful plan of God.

Why are we unique? Because we have a spirit. We have come from God, we are returning to God and we live forever. So God has created us with His nature, with a spirit. So it's good news and bad news. Good news because we can live forever with God. Bad news is we can live burning in hell forever, and that's really bad news -- bad news for people who deny the existence of life after death.

So we are created in the image of God. Why? God is a Trinity, He is Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, sharing love, sharing their relationship. Because God is a Trinity, God extended that relationship to you and to me and said, "Come and share in our beautiful unity and life." So we can walk with God, we can talk with God, we can commune with God, we can share our lives with God. That's why He created us. That's why when we don't have it there's an emptiness inside of us. I've said it earlier about St. Augustine who picked it up perfectly without knowing any of this background. He said, "Our hearts have been made for thee O God, and it will not find rest until it rests in thee." This beautiful call from God.

But that's not all. God has given us another call, another job. We find it here in the second part of this verse:

Genesis 1:26 continued

...and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.

In modern terms, God created us hybrid. We are having a spirit with which we commune with God, we walk with God, we talk with God, we live with God. We have a body and a mental soul that is having the mission of looking after creation, looking after nature, looking after the animals and making the creation itself fruitful. We have a job to do and that's what the Bible tells us about ourselves. We are created to walk with God, to live with God, to commune with God in his Holy Trinity, and we are created to bring this creation into a relationship with God so that they also can participate in the life of the Holy Trinity. That would be a beautiful thing because of the life and the authority that God has given, when we say something, if you move in creation, you don't have to do anything else because we are in harmony and unity with God and with creation. That's the original plan.

The problem is the disruption. I read the disruption briefly last week but let's look at it again. This harmony between the Holy Trinity, humanity and the rule of creation worked beautifully. But then a disruption comes and here it is:

Genesis 3:6

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

Eve ate the fruit not for evil but for good. The three things she expected from it were:

1. Good for food - tasty
2. Pleasing to the eye - beautiful
3. Desirable for gaining wisdom

Who would blame her for eating? What was the problem? A beautiful system was in place. Humanity didn't have to grab anything, hold anything, ask for anything because they were in communion with the Holy Trinity, and they received everything from God and they shared it with the rest of creation. There was beautiful harmony. But the temptation was, instead of receiving everything from God in perfect harmony, grab it for yourself. The moment they grabbed it, this harmony was disrupted. That's the origin of our pain. That's the origin of our struggle. The harmony was disrupted and when the harmony was disrupted, many things began to happen. See how revelatory these texts are, thousands of years later, revealing the heart of human struggle:

Genesis 3:7

Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realised they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

The moment their connection was disrupted, the connection between the both of them was disrupted. That's where disharmony came.

Genesis 3:8

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as He was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord among the trees of the garden.

Harmony was broken, the relationship with God was disrupted and the moment it was disrupted, the relationship with each other was disrupted. Today's world the same thing is happening. Then the next generation became worse. You know of Cain and Abel. Cain was not able to look after his brother. First it was a disruption with God, then with one another and then it is the murder of your own brother. Here is the root cause of disharmony in the whole world.

So this background is necessary to understand how all things come together at His feet. You can see a separation from the Holy Trinity, separation between husband and wife, separation between children -- a disharmony in the original plan of God. But it didn't stop there, it went further:

Genesis 3:17

To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.

Separation from God, separation from each other, separation going down into the generations, conflict. That's what you call brokenness. The harmony is gone, the continuity is gone and then it flows into creation. Now creation fights back where it would have worked in beautiful harmony with Adam and Eve. A word with the authority of God would have brought creation into beautiful fruit and harmony. A word revealed by the power of the Spirit will bring into creation things that were not before. Such a beautiful moment became a major conflict with nature.

Genesis 3:18

It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.

What are thorns and thistles? It will resist you. It will fight against you. Today, isn't living a burden? Isn't fighting against all things to try and live itself a burden? Here it is.

Genesis 3:19

By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.

That's what we say on Ash Wednesday. Here is the state of humanity. Actually there are stories of how nature cooperates with people who are right with God. There is this famous author called Taylor Caldwell who has written this book on St. Luke, the great physician. In this book, it is taken from tradition where in the wilderness of Syria, there are dogs that cannot be tamed. It is said that St. Luke could actually commune with these dogs. Right with God, right with each other, right with creation. St. Francis of Assisi, connected with God, right with the brothers and sisters, right with creation -- harmony. The dream of God is harmony. The result of sin is brokenness, pain, thistles and thorns in life. It's inside us. We are crying but we don't know why we are crying. We know we have lost it but we don't know what we have lost.

It is to this world that the epiphany is coming -- God's revelation and answer. So God's answer also begins with one man. This whole brokenness starts with one couple and God's answer begins with one man: my friend, Abraham.

Genesis 12:1

The Lord said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you."

What did He mean? Leave the fighting, leave the struggling, leave the worldly way of thinking. I will show you a new way. That's what we call salvation. A new way to live, a new way to have communion with God, a new way to have communion with each other and a new way to have communion with nature.

You must remember, Abraham was called but the solution was bigger than Abraham. Therefore God says, "Once you start walking with me as an individual, I will do the next step."

Genesis 12:2

"I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you..."

Adam and Eve were called to communion with God, and then they were called to look after the environment, to look after the animals, to look after the world. He is telling Abraham the same thing. "I am starting again. I am coming to meet you, and through you I will make a great nation."

Genesis 12:2 continued

...I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.

All the time it's to do with something more than Abraham. Tonight I want to tell you, your life is more than yourself. God's plan for you is more than you. It's not just about making you comfortable and to live your own life. It's more than you. Abraham was called and from Abraham to a nation.

Genesis 12:3

I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all people on earth will be blessed through you.

Can you see the sequence? Abraham the individual, through him a people and now through the people the blessing of all the people on earth. Salvation. It's bigger than you. It's bigger than me. No wonder we're not satisfied, no wonder we don't have peace fully, because God's plan is bigger than us. We need an epiphany, we need a revelation to find that place. It starts with Abraham, moves on to a people. We can see the sequence in the scripture:

Deuteronomy 7:6

For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be His people, His treasured possession.

Now the Israelites thought, "Others are going to get it and we are going to be favoured because we are the treasured possession of God." I'm thinking we in the Church thought like that for maybe a thousand years, and now all the new churches think like that. "We are the possession of God! We are the treasure of God!" And sometimes we tend to think it may be because we are holier than others, because we are greater than others, because we have sacrificed more than others, because we pray more than others, because we read the scripture more than others, because we preach the word more than others. We think that's why we are chosen by God. Sorry to disappoint you, verse 7 explains why:

Deuteronomy 7:7

The Lord did not set His affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples.

God is turning human values upside down. He chose you but not for the reason you are thinking.

Deuteronomy 7:8

But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath He swore to your forefathers that He brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Why did He save this weak nation? Because through the nation, the whole world. An individual, a people, a nation and the whole world -- the plan of God's salvation. The original plan was Adam and Eve, communion with God and living in harmony with the Holy Trinity, spirit alive and awakened and through Adam and Eve, the harmony with the whole universe, creation, animals, life forms, environment. This disrupted thing God is redeeming by His great love.

You see it here beautifully. John the Baptist was preaching the sermon, and the people became indignant - specially the learned - with John the Baptist:

Matthew 3:9

And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.

They thought they were chosen and they believed it. Even today they are the chosen. But they thought it was a blood thing, it was a race thing and it was for them. We are also thinking that way. "We are the Church, it is for us that Jesus came, it is for us that Jesus died, it is for us He is living as the Risen Lord." That's true, but something bigger is at work.

God wants to restore the harmony of a broken world through His people, through you, through me. Brokenness is so deep because of our separation with God and with each other and with the universe, we have got into this illusion that we can survive by ourselves. That's why we hurt the people in our lives, assuming that by rejecting them we can independently find meaning, happiness, fulfillment for our own lives. We don't realise that we are connected. The realizations of connectedness has disappeared with sin, and that's the tragedy we are dealing with. We don't realise that by exploiting the environment we are destroying ourselves. That when you burn the forest of the Amazon, that the weather of the world is changing. It's only now people are realising it! 20 years ago they said that if you exploit the forest cover of the world, the temperature will change, the nature of storms will change, the storms will become intense, the droughts will become deeper, the cold will become greater and there will be tremendous destruction in the world. They said there will be super storms that will come, and today they have come! 5 years ago it was predicted that a global virus will come because we are global whether we accept it or not. We are part of one world. Nobody took it seriously, and today we are suffering the consequences.

Why is that? Because the human mind is broken and fragmented and unable to comprehend that we are a part of this whole system. Someone explained it beautifully. He said, it's like we are all in a boat and somebody gets a bright idea and says, "We can make a quick profit by digging the bottom of the boat and selling the pieces." So one starts and one fellow sees one doing it and he also wants a profit and digs, and then another wants a profit and digs, and before long the boat which we need for our survival is sinking. That is the ark. People are looking for Noah's ark but actually the earth is the ark in which God has given all life forms to be nurtured.

We don't see it and we don't realise it because of what we call brokenness. It's not just sadness because somebody kicked me in the face, it's not sadness because somebody gave me a hard word. Those are only manifestations. The real brokenness is I've lost my connection with God, I'm abandoned from deep inside. I walk alone. I'm fighting my own battle. I'm trying to meet my own needs. Broken, I've lost the connection. Because of that I'm fighting nature, I'm fighting the environment, I'm fighting people. No wonder we are tired at the end of the day because we are fighting the whole world! We don't have harmony.

God answers it, starting through Abraham, flowing through the people, suddenly epiphany. God appears in the world. That's the meaning of the word epiphany. He appears, to bring it all back to Himself. That's the gospel of epiphany. Let's look at it together. I'm not going to read the whole gospel because it's about Herod acting like a madman. Herod is the epitomization of brokenness. He is trying to protect his own interests, he is trying to deal with this and deal with that.

Matthew 2:1

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem...

I was reading history about this, how it became kings. It was never the kings. These were people like astrologers, wise men who were able to read the signs of the stars. There is a reason for that and I'll come to it later.

Matthew 2:2-3

...and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him." When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

When you are broken, when you are fragmented, you take everything at your level. Today you find world leaders like that, who are thinking of the world from their own levels. I don't know what to call the followers who fall into that same thinking pattern. Herod thought, "It's about me! My kingdom is going to be lost so I better do something about it." Fragmented, broken, can't see beyond his own nose. That's what sin will do to us.

Matthew 2:4

When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born.

Here Christ means the Messiah, the King who was going to come and liberate the people.

Matthew 2:5

"In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written..."

We won't read the prophecy so let's move forward.

Matthew 2:7-8

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

What worship, he wanted to destroy his opponent! Typical politician. Herod even killed some of his own relations and some of his children so killing somebody who was a threat to him was no problem for him. That's his solution, and today so many people are having such solutions.

Matthew 2:9-10

After they heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.

Epiphany, nature and the cosmos united and came together to stop over the stable to worship our God. Epiphany. God had appeared. Who came? The stars came in the sky. The plan of God is not just to make you rich and me rich and me comfortable and you comfortable. That's all brokenness. Here is His huge plan. He is healing and bringing to harmony the whole universe. Where does He start? With the stars, with

the cosmos. The responsibility He gave Adam, now the whole universe is coming to the feet of the Lord God who has appeared on the earth.

It shakes you and you begin to realise the star revolved around the child and stopped there. The whole world revolves around Jesus Christ. It's only if you have Him in the right place that the world will have proper sense. Otherwise you will have nonsense and that's what the world is having. Nietzsche, who did the worst to destroy our faith in God - a German philosopher who destroyed our faith in God and they say today that people are not coming to Church in Europe, and I saw on CNN that somebody has done a project to take photographs of abandoned churches in Europe. Hundreds abandoned! It's not just because of worldliness. It's because faith in God was destroyed by a new concept of something called enlightenment. People walked away from it, and Nietzsche did that most. He spent the last 10 years of his life insane. He paid the price. Why? Because to have a meaning to your own life and to see a meaning in the universe, you have to have the child Jesus in the center of your life.

Matthew 2:11

On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.

They worshipped him. I want to offer you a beautiful thing. The star came, the harmony of the world came. Then the kings came. Who are these kings? They represent the wisdom of the world. If the world's wisdom has to find the answer, they have to have Jesus at their center. Independent of him you will never have an answer. Then who came? Gentiles came. These three kings were Gentiles. The harmony of the universe, of humanity is having Jesus at the center. Who else? The shepherds came. They were the poorest of the poor. The answer to their poverty has appeared in epiphany. Here he is. The answer to the poor, to the lost, the answer to the rich and the powerful, the answer to the uneducated in the shepherds but an answer also to the wise. The greatest wisdom of God had appeared on the earth. Epiphany. Even more, the animals. Adam and Eve were given in charge of the animals. That's why he is born in a stable with animals. The harmony between God, humanity and the animal kingdom brought together in a stable. But there's more. He is laid in a manger. Disobedience breaks the chain. It's only obedience and sacrifice that will bring it back together. Here he is: Obedient to the Father, offered as a sacrifice, in that sacrifice is the new harmony of the universe brought together at the feet of a child. Epiphany - the beauty of what God is doing in this world.

I read this sermon of Bishop Fulton Sheen and I thought I must say his words. It's such a brilliant explanation of epiphany: **One night there went out over the stillness of the evening breeze, out over those chalky hills of Bethlehem, the cry of a new born babe...** He creates the image of the cry of a child that night... **The Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us...** First it's the cry of a child and then he says the word became flesh and dwelt amongst us. Epiphany... **Earth did not hear the cry, for the earth slept...** Even today it's the same thing... **men did not hear the cry, for they did not know that a child could be greater than a man; kings did not hear the cry, for they did not know that a King could be born in a stable...** You're bowled by these words... **empires did not hear the cry, for empires did not know that an Infant could hold the reins that steer sunshine and worlds in their courses...** When you hear that, how could they imagine that this infant could make the stars move in the galaxies in the universe? Epiphany. God has appeared. We are stunned by His revelation.

...But shepherds and philosophers heard the cry, for only the very simple and the very learned know that the heart of a God can cry out in the cry of a Child. Epiphany. We are gathered at His feet. It goes on... And they came with gifts -- and adored, and so great was the majesty seated on the brow of the Child, so great was the dignity of the babe, so powerful was the light of these eyes that shone like celestial suns, that they could not help but cry out: "Emmanuel, God is with us."

How do we join into the Epiphany? I found this beautiful example of joining into the Epiphany and worshipping the child God. This is a picture of two hands and it's world famous. The moment you see these hands you know them. This is actually drawn by a world famous artist of the 15th century, Albrecht Durer. The story of these hands is beautiful. He was a child of a family which had 17 other children. So there were 18 in the family. Two of them Albrecht and Albert, were two brothers and both of them were gifted artists. They had no money to develop their gift so both of them decided one day to toss a coin. The person who wins the toss will go for 4 years to study in the university in Cologne. Then he will return and the other will go. While the other person goes for 4 years, to support him, the other brother will work in the mines and after working in the mines will make enough money to support the brother who is out there.

So they tossed the coin and Albrecht won the toss. He went to Cologne and Albert went to the mine. For 4 years he dug, he pulled, he pushed, he carried the dirt in the mine. It didn't take 6 months for the world to recognise the gift of Albrecht. He became world famous in 4 years. He came back and they had this dinner. During this dinner Albrecht said, "Brother, you can go now because I have made enough money for you to go and study." He said, "Thank you for the invitation but it's too late now. Look at my hands. My hands, by mining for 4 years has lost its capacity to do any kind of artwork. In fact I'm hardly able to hold a cup in my hand, see how it shivers. My chance is over, but because of my work, a beautiful thing has emerged in the world -- connectedness."

This brother was sad that this happened. So what he did was, when his brother was praying with these gnarled and wounded hands, quietly he watched from a corner and he drew it as a tribute to the sacrifice that made him world famous.

Meaning to life is not being successful all the time or being famous or being powerful, but fitting in perfectly with the plan of God. When you do that, your sacrifice, like the lamb, like the child in that manger will change the world and bring the harmony back.

Isn't that really what happens in a family? When a father refuses to be a parent and a husband how the family suffers and the child suffers. When a mother walks away from her motherhood, children become so broken and wounded that they repeat what the mother did in their own life, like Cain and Abel did. What's the answer? Sacrifice, like God's epiphany, He appeared.

It is beautifully said that every man came on earth to live but one man appeared on earth to die so that the whole world can live. That's why in our journey every suffering has a meaning if you're connected, every pain, every struggle has a meaning if you're connected, because through it God is bringing the harmony of the universe together and we are a part of His plan. When you refuse and you look after your own self and you protect yourself by yourself, not only are you broken but you are breaking the plan that God has for this world.

Epiphany. Where does it start? Worship. Let's sit in awe at His feet and begin with a heart of worship. Worship our God. What a wisdom, what a revelation, what an insight of the heart of God. We are stunned by who He is. Over 2000 years this revelation has matured in the lives of so many in the Church that we are ordered it on the Feast of Epiphany. The words of Bishop Fulton Sheen, you can imagine the richness of that journey. Let's ask the Lord to make us a part of this beautiful harmony He is building in this world. People are asking God, "Why aren't you being a virus killer? Why aren't you inoculating the world? Why aren't you looking after people?" as if God is a security guard, without realising He is doing something bigger, greater, deeper than we can ever imagine.