

Homily The Epiphany 2025

A Happy, Healthy and Prosperous New Year to You and Your Families

‘Actions speak louder than words’ (Anon)

Tomáš Halík, Catholic priest and theologian, writes in his 2024 book ‘The Afternoon of Christianity’ that we are at a Kairos moment in the life of The Catholic Church. Kairos is understood here as a moment of great opportunity, a time of opportunity for maturity and growth, despite the crisis facing us. Halík goes on to state, and I paraphrase, ‘people know the kind of God we worship not so much by the faith we profess but by our **actions**, the way we moment by moment live out our faith.’ I find that statement both patently obvious but refreshingly challenging as it makes me ask myself what kind of God people see in my day-to-day actions, and do those actions reflect the God of my faith, Jesus?

Isaiah almost 800 years before the Birth of Christ prophesied that Yahweh would be God of all nations and underlines this message, foretelling the Adoration of The Messiah by Gentile Kings bearing gifts of gold and frankincense. Such a teaching would have been shocking to The Chosen People at that time in history, because the Jews considered themselves sole children of Yahweh and exclusive custodians of God’s revelation. This was for the Israelites a Kairos moment, but one which they overall treated as a missed opportunity. From the crisis they failed to mature as God’s First Born, choosing not to open their hearts to their Gentile ‘siblings’. When in today’s Gospel of Matthew, the Gentile Magi visit our newborn Saviour the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled and in Jesus’ ministry his actions consistently endorse the truth, the Jews ‘first among equals’, the ‘equals’ being all other nations on earth.

St Paul, The Apostle of The Gentiles, in his Letter to The Ephesians reinforces the fact that God’s message is indeed for all peoples and endorses Gentile equality, ‘This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.’, The Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15), grasped the Kairos moment as Paul and Barnabas put the case for Gentiles to be welcomed into the Early Christian Community without undergoing ritual circumcision. The Council’s ratification of this new order set The Early Church in a radically new direction, The Good News of Jesus was to be preached to all, Jews and Gentiles, without distinction. This momentous decision led to a golden age of evangelisation and growth of The Church throughout The Roman Empire, despite persecution.

Today, arguably another Kairos moment (a moment of great opportunity) is being presented to The Church, amid the current crisis of shrinkage and disillusionment. We, clergy and laity together as equals, can either seize the moment and take the courageous decision to return to a community of servants of The Lord passionately ablaze with The Holy Spirit or like the Old Testament Jews remain in our ‘hardness of heart’, refusing to take the radical steps which would transform and revitalise our ailing and increasingly out of touch Church.

Halík infers that we will only become servants of The Lord ablaze with The Holy Spirit: when our **actions** are pure and sincere; when we compassionately and

humbly **bring** Good News to the poor; when we lovingly and meaningfully **guide** the blind; when we **remove** heavy burdens from people's shoulders, setting them free from their prisons of worry, guilt and fear; when we **are available** to **love and serve** our neighbour 24/7. It is only then, according to Halik, people will see the God we profess our faith in. It is my perception however, that the God we too often project by our **actions**, both clergy and laity is: a hard and distant God; a God who demands duty and who instils guilt; an angry God; a home alone deity, oblivious and passive to the desperate situations of many vulnerable and marginalised groups and individuals; a God who clock watches and measures and rations his time spent with us; a God who fails to appreciate the harsh realities of the lives of many of his children, lifting not a hand to help them.....

John the Baptist openly warns us, 'Do not be so arrogant about your salvation, saying to yourselves, "We have Abraham as our father," for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham' (Mt 3:9). Again, Jesus reminds us, 'It is not those who say, "Lord, Lord" who are my brothers and sisters and mother but those who **DO** the will of my Father' (Mt 17). Finally, Jesus cautions us, 'The tree will be recognised by its fruit.' (Mt 12:37). All these Gospel passages emphasise, **both faith and actions which reflect that faith in Jesus, are required of disciples. (James 2:14-26)**. In short, it's not enough to be a Catholic or to be a member of The Church, we must also **ACT** as our faith demands,

The question I therefore, now logically pose myself is, 'Am I an 'atheistic believer' who projects by my negative ACTIONS a tyrant, unfeeling and distant God, lacking in tenderness and mercy whilst paradoxically is it not often so-called non-believers, through lives lived in service and altruistic love, who show in their **actions** our compassionate Servant King to the world?