

“The Manifestation of the Spirit” (1st Corinthians 12:7)

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. As you know “epiphany” is about God being manifest. We need for this to be the case, because if God did not reveal Himself then we would never know Him, nor would we ever be saved. This is why we have to be careful when we encounter the popular objection to believing to God: *“Why should I believe in a God that I cannot see?”* This objection along with many other objections is used to keep a safe distance from faith and from entering into a relationship with the Living God, especially when it is presupposed that such faith is unreasonable and without warrant.

Unfortunately, the answers that come back from Christians to those who state this objection are often inaccurate. How many Christians with good intentions will answer the objection, *“Why should I believe in a God that I cannot see?”* with something along the lines of, *“You just need to believe.”*? What is perpetuated here is the idea of “blind faith”. Now it’s easy to be confused about these matters. After-all, at first glance it may seem that the Bible itself supports such an idea. Consider for example Hebrews 11:1: ***“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”*** Well there you have it: faith is

the conviction of things not seen. Case closed. Christians must therefore believe in blind faith. Not so fast.

There is a biblical context and backdrop to these words. To put it simply: if God suddenly appeared in all of His glory – in front of you and me right here and right now – we would all be in a lot of trouble. As sinful human beings, we would be overwhelmed. No one can see the full glory of God and survive. Even to Moses, God said, ***“Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen.”*** (Exodus 33:23) The ancient church father Tertullian commented on this state of affairs: *“It is not permitted us to contemplate the sun, in the full amount of [its] substance which is in the heavens, but we can only endure with our eyes a ray”* (ANF3:609). It is in this respect that the Bible records God speaking these words in Exodus 33:20: ***“But,” he said, “you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.”***

This is why we sometimes explain this situation in terms of God “hiding” Himself. He hides Himself not in the sense that He is undetectable, but in the sense that we do not and cannot see His full glory. This is indeed an important biblical teaching. Listen to the words of Isaiah the prophet: ***“Truly, you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, the Savior.”*** (Isaiah 45:15) Again, thank God that He does, because if He appeared in His full glory, we would be overwhelmed by the light and majesty of His presence and we would die.

So it is important to explain the situation: yes, there is a sense in which God is not seen, but there is *also* a sense in which God is very much seen. During the season of Epiphany, we believe, teach, and confess the ways in which God *is* seen. So make no mistake about it: people can see God, but it is also part and parcel of the Church's ministry to proclaim *in what way* God has revealed in His Word He will be seen. He is not seen according to our whims. He is not seen in the way that would serve sin and pride, but He *is* seen in the way that He has ordained to be seen. And if you and I are foolish enough to reject His ways to be seen; that is, if we refuse to live in faith that trusts in His Word, then we will not see Him and this world will seem very lonely indeed. But on the other hand, when we are led to see God as He wills to be seen – in faith – then the floodgates open: then God will be seen in many ways!

God the Father according to Sacred Scripture is very much seen through His creation (Romans 1) and through our very consciences (Romans 2) which He also created. Romans 1:19-20 is perhaps one of the most exciting verses in Scripture in this regard: ***“For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.”***

God the Son according to Sacred Scripture was seen when in Him God took on flesh and walked the earth. It is absolutely mind-boggling and yet the occasion for the greatest thanksgiving that when those first-century disciples looked into the face and the eyes of this man Jesus Christ, that they were looking into the face and the eyes of God Almighty maker of heaven and earth. In John 14:8-9 Philip said to Christ, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” Jesus said to him, ***“Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?”***

But dear Christians, our Great God is so gracious, so compassionate, and knows us so much better than we know ourselves. He knows that we *still* have doubts. Remember Luke 16 on the rich man and Lazarus? The rich man died and was in torment in Hades (Luke 16:23). There he begs Abraham to send the poor man Lazarus (who went to heaven) to warn the rich man's living brothers so as to keep them out of Hades. Do you remember the reply from Abraham? He said, ***“They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.” And then he said, “If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.”*** (Luke 16:29 & 31)

God knew that for our sake, for our salvation, He still needed to manifest Himself to us. As a great wonder as the

creation is; as miraculous as the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ truly is; we still need a manifestation today, the manifestation of the Father and of the Son is therefore served and complemented by the manifestation of the Holy Spirit. And for this manifestation; for this way for the world to see God, God not only uses the magnificent grandeur of seas and mountains, of waterfalls and breath-taking valleys; not only does He use the historical fact of Jesus walking on earth and then His empty tomb after His crucifixion all on account of God becoming man in human history; but God ALSO uses something else as well! God the Holy Spirit makes God seen, and heard, and felt, all here and now in and through...**you. The Holy Spirit – God Himself – is made manifest in and through you.**

1st Corinthians 12:7 says this: ***“To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”*** God has made Himself known and seen through His people so that the God who loved us when He created the heavens and the earth to give us life; so that the God who loved us when He went to the cross to bear our sin and cover those sins with His holy and precious blood, would *also* be the God who says, *“Look, I am real, I am here so that I may be seen. I am here through the Word – through Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms and the Gospels and the Epistles – through my Holy Word. I am here through the Holy Sacrament which you my people receive. I am here as I fill you with my love and with the gifts of*

God the Holy Spirit...so that others would receive my love and service through you!” You are the people of God. You are the Body of Christ. You are the hands, the feet, the eyes, the lips of Christ. God is also seen in you. His light shines in you because He has baptized you; given you the Holy and His various manifestations can be seen in you!

It is amazing to consider just how gracious our dear Lord has chosen to be: that we would be called “the children of God”! It is absolutely astounding! We know that we are poor sinners, and yet the Lord has chosen to live and work through you. Make no mistake about it: people will continue to state intellectual objections and stubborn emotional positions against the existence of God. People will continue to resist the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, but when Christians like you believe the truth that God also is made manifest in His people, then you too by the Word of Christ will be God’s manifestation. Yes, a Christian is still a sinner, but a Christian is also born again by water and the Spirit. You are now someone made new who defies the way of the world so that God may be seen!

People hate, you love; people shun, you embrace; people begrudge, you forgive; people live in a lie, you hold to the truth; people run from God, you run towards Him every day to remain in His mercy and grace in Christ Jesus! Do you do this perfectly? Of course not, but you have a new life.

Because you're such a good person? Of course not, but on account of the fact that the Holy Spirit has been given to you so therefore Christ has been given to you, and those with Christ are unable to just sit around, because Christ is also responsible for our sanctification. In Christ whether you have received the manifestation of God in respect to wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, the working of miracles, prophecy, the ability to distinguish between spirits, the ability to speak in other languages, the ability to interpret other languages (1st Corinthians 12:8-10)...whatever your manifestation of the Spirit may be, God shows Himself in and through you.

Don't let this be an academic lesson or theory or mere idea. Humble yourself by the grace of God in Christ and marvel and wonder: God makes Himself known in and through you. There is an epiphany going on of God appearing in your life! Live it up! Live in love! Be glad not to operate in the way of the world that is only concerned with itself. Rejoice that your old self has been crucified with Christ; rejoice that in your baptismal grace you are raised up as God's new creation (2nd Corinthians 5:17). Rejoice that you already live in the kingdom of God in your midst, in your life (Luke 17:21). Rejoice that the Holy Spirit is indeed active in you, giving you the Word to keep you in Christ and working through you the manifestation of God through His gifts in you so that the world may say, "Yes, I have seen God through one of His very own! He touched me through one of His children! He loved me through one of His

disciples! He helped me through one who worships Jesus Christ!" Is there any greater honor or blessing than this? God is made manifest in and through you!