

“The Church – All of You – Are Christ’s Epiphany...Especially For
The Unborn”

Rev. Dr. Alfonso O. Espinosa

January 27th, 2013

Introduction: We’ve Been Talking “Epiphanies”...the Wise Men following the Star; The Baptism of Christ; The Holy Spirit in your life (last week); but there is another and it is our life together as the people of God, the body of Christ, the Holy Church esp. as we stand together to speak the truth in love -- even if we are persecuted -- in the face of evil in the world.

And it is important in this regard that we cut to the chase and speak of those things which are most difficult to address and stand against. Luther addressed this principle:

“Neither is it of any help if someone would say, ‘I will gladly confess Christ and His Word in every other article, except that I may keep silence about one or two that my tyrants may not tolerate...’ For whoever denies Christ in one article or word has denied the same Christ... [in] all the articles...” (Luther’s letter to Graf Albrecht von Mansfeld on June 3rd, 1523, Concordia Journal/Fall 2009, p. 356f)

A. It is so easy to be silent about so many things nowadays!

B. Why is it so sinfully easy?

1. We like to avoid controversy, confrontation, and offense.
2. Closely related is that we want to be liked.
3. And frankly we all experience the gravitational pull of universalism in American religiously...the goal is to simply have a general “belief in God,” “to be a good person,” and to avoid absolutisms whenever

possible. After all, if you do this, then you can maintain that you are not a “judgmental” person...after all, didn’t Jesus say, “Do not judge. (Matt 7:1a)”?! Answer: Jesus did, but He did not mean do not discern between good and evil OR do not take a stand against evil...He meant do not condemn (leave eternal destinies in the hands of God where they belong)...but on the other hand, you must take a stand...not in order to demonize people (for we are all sinners), but in order to be faithful to God and in order to truly love your neighbor!

C. How important is this?

Matthew 5:13: **“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.”**

D. Part of our problem, is that we let way too much time go by and just put things off...and tomorrow never comes! Like I have been putting things off as your pastor and it’s been bothering me.

E. For the first time in pastoral ministry and I’m sure only by the grace of God, I began to lead a “life-ministry” in my congregation at Living Word Lutheran Church, The Woodlands, TX while I served there from 2002-2010. We had a very simple and focused and pro-active approach: we participated in “40 Days of Life” with other Christian Churches (trans-denominational) in the Houston Area that organized to stand vigil at the local Planned Parenthood centers in the Houston area, including the largest complex of Planned Parenthood on the North American Continent in Houston, TX.

- F. As many of you know Planned Parenthood was started by Margaret Sanger who was the greatest modern advocate and leader of abortion in America in the history of our country.
- G. You know about the Holocaust and the 6 million Jews who were murdered by the Nazi's. While I traveled in Germany recently, I saw a very large memorial to those Jews in Berlin...it was striking and commands an ongoing memorial so that the Holocaust would never be forgotten.
- H. Well there are other things that mustn't be forgotten nor ignored by the Christian Church if we are to be Christ's light in this world. A lot happened last week: the country celebrated the contributions of the civil rights leader Martin Luther King, President Obama was inaugurated, but did you catch the significance of Tuesday, January 22nd? It was the 40th anniversary of Roe vs. Wade, when legalized abortion in America became a reality. Again, we remember the 6 million Jews who were the murdered victims of the Holocaust, but we cannot forget, we must not forget either the 50...the 50 million unborn babies who had no defenders when they were murdered (think of all the people in the state of California plus millions more, murdered)...and make no mistake about that regardless of the most or least sophisticated reasons for conducting those abortions, innocent human beings have been slaughtered in the womb. Let it said plainly and simply: abortion is a crass violation of God's 5th commandment: "Thou shalt not murder." As a country, we are without excuse.

Part I: This is what I think about:

- A. I think about the fantastic joy I've experience in having children. Every single one of my children has not only proven to be a gift from God in this world and for this world, but a very peculiar and unique gift – each and every one – for me. I have never experienced the gamut and intensity of emotions in life than those emotions attached to my children...the greatest concern, the greatest pride, and the greatest excitement for what happens in their lives...I had no idea until I became a father.
- B. I can recount many experiences in all eight of their lives, but one I'll never forget for as long as I live...I was in our little Riverside apartment during my vicarage. A.J. was almost two years old when I called him over to watch the scene in a Christmas movie depicting the birth of Jesus Christ...what I saw in him made me marvel...he ran in place, he shook, tears streamed from his eyes, he was trying to speak, but it came out like holy babble (no he's not a charismatic), and as I watched him I thought I could feel the energy surrounding him...he was filled with awe, and joy, and wonder at the thought and at the sight of this movie depiction of the birth of Our Savior...He was filled with faith. Talk about an epiphany! I can't imagine life without any of my children.
- C. But there was also one of the saddest days of my life...Traci and I had A.J. and Elizabeth...and we were joyful for our third child in 1991 and I am not speaking of Danielle born in 1992. We didn't know why we were so certain that Traci had a boy in her womb...we were just convinced...so we named him very early on (we had not done that for any of the other children). His name was Joshua. And for reasons only the Lord knows, he was taken early on in Traci's womb...but to this day, I know I've had 9 children, not 8.

- D. And from where I stand I think of the children of this parish...and I cannot imagine this parish, this congregation without them. They make us whole and in God's sight who in Christ said that we must be like them to enter heaven (Matthew 18:1-4). It has been my fantastic joy to serve them. After our next class to be confirmed this May (consisting of junior high school aged children), I will be recommending that we no longer wait for a child to be in 7th or 8th grade to be confirmed, but that we confirm them when they are ready period (and for many its long before junior high school).
- E. But I also think of my time with "40 Days of Life". One day a woman came out and asked if she could stand vigil with us, to pray, to hear from God's Word, and to be ready to witness and to offer pro-life resources to women in need (making them aware of other options and resources outside of Planned Parenthood). I could tell something was up and sure enough (the woman having noticed my clerical collar) asked if I would hear her confession. How could I deny her? She knelt down (and we were standing on the street by the curb) and she confessed...long ago, she had had an abortion. I knelt down next to her, placed my hand on her head and pronounced holy absolution. I assured her that all of her sins, including the sin of abortion, were washed away by the blood of the Lamb. She stood with the assurance of forgiveness and love. That too I will never forget. She went on to tell me of her other child she had had. She was so proud of him. He had gone to become an attorney.
- F. And all children are given a body and a soul...and God's intention is to always bless with life and love. And no matter how any child quote unquote "turns out"...regardless of their life circumstances...their lives have inestimable value, they are precious to God, and they are gifts to the Church...no

matter what. All of them deserve to be defended and we should even more stop going along with the fear that we might be getting too political. Yes we Lutherans have a clear doctrine of the two kingdoms, but we cannot pretend to ignore what has happened in front of our noses: we have gone along with the argument (for much too long) that private morality must be kept out of the public square, because just the opposite has been forced upon us: the public square is now dictating – at least trying to very boldly I might add – to dictate your private morality...make no mistake the world is preaching to you every, single day...forcing you in so many words to go along with abortion every, single day. What are we going to do about it? I believe our first move is to get out there...not to be obnoxious, not to demonize, not to get violent or crazy, but to speak up and to be visibly available to pray for people, to share the Word of God with them, and to offer resources to them that steer them away from the propaganda of abortionists who treat the unborn like tissue or as an appendix...these are people, human beings with souls...known by God fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14).

Part 2 and Conclusion: But I cannot leave you with a sense of Law-Urging...I must always leave you with the Gospel.

- A. What compels us?
- B. We are not trying to be Pharisees...we are not trying to take a cause to feel good about ourselves or to claim that we are somehow less sinful (we're not).
- C. So what are we really doing?

- D. We are confessing our faith.
- E. All of this is not morality for the sake of morality, but all of this for Christians is about Jesus.
- F. The Son of God – very God of very God – became a man, but He was not formed like the first Adam was...nor was his first day in the form of a mature man/a grown man like the first Adam was. Instead, 9 months before Christmas, there was the first Christmas...if we may be so bold, perhaps the “real” Christmas...the one on March 25th...9 months before December 25th. Jesus, the Son of God, our Savior, took on our flesh, became a man, and was a human being...already at conception...at conception God entered life. At conception He was Jesus; at conception He was the Savior of the world; at conception He was already sanctifying the womb that every child has ever lived in...at conception.
- G. And as people, as human beings, as cousins...one day Jesus and John the Baptist had some kind of conversation going and John leapt in the womb. Scientists tell us that babies respond to sound, they know voices, they react, they can feel pain...they are alive...Jesus paved the way...this is when life begins because the Way, the Truth, and the Life who bore our sins and defeated death to save us from sin and hell started his life among us in the womb. This is when life begins...this is where all of the little brothers and sisters of Jesus begin to live...and when we celebrate the life of our Savior, we are celebrating their lives too...and ours...our speaking up then is really simple confession of faith and one we are not ashamed of, because this is how our Savior came into the world to save us.