

January 4, 2009 – Feast of the Epiphany
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Isaiah 60:1-6	“Arise, shine out for your light has come”
Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6	All are coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.
Matthew 2:1-12	Following a star Magi from the East arrived in Jerusalem to pay homage to the new born child Jesus.

Happy Feast of the Epiphany! This feast challenges us with these questions: 1) Will you let the light within you shine forth? 2) How can I live more meaningfully? 3) What are you searching for?

The night of November 4, 2008 is forever etched in my memory. On that night a new light shone forth that transcended the darkness of the racial divide in the election of Barack Obama as the first African-American president in the history of the United States. A light also shone forth here in Musoma, Tanzania where there is a 13-year old boy who allows his gift as an artist to shine forth in the midst of a difficult situation. “Arise, shine out for your light has come” This is his story in his own words:

“My name is Zakaria Bwire. I was born in May 1995 and my father died in 1995. My mother is sick with AIDS. Our family has six children, all boys. I am sick with spleen and stomach problems. [Zakaria has sickle cell anemia which has affected his spleen, liver, and heart.] I have chosen to draw pictures in the hope that it will help me earn some money for the hospital and for food. In this way, I hope to receive more help from people. I am selling cards with envelopes for 200 Tanzanian shillings [10 cents.]”

I often visit our two charity homes for homeless and abandoned people, called Mji Wa Huruma (Homes of Compassion) in Swahili. In the smaller home of about 20 people, I go regularly to help a young man in his early 30s take a bath; his legs were paralyzed since birth and he is unable to walk. His name is Albinus Anyanchage and whenever I go and visit him he gives me a big, beautiful smile of Karibu! (welcome) from his bed where he is confined most of the time. As we take him for his bath, his is happy to know that he is not alone and that we care about him. This makes him feel that his life has dignity and is meaningful. What greater gift can we give at Epiphany than sharing life and concern? This sharing brings smiles and makes life worth living for everyone.

On Christmas Day last month, the newly consecrated bishop of the Diocese of Musoma, Michael Msonganzila, decided to spend Christmas morning with us presiding at the Eucharistic celebration and to see this larger charity home of compassion, where over 120 abandoned and homeless people who are physically and mentally challenged, lepers who are cured of leprosy, those with HIV and AIDS as well as many elderly people who have no place to go have come to live.

What was the bishop searching for and what was he coming to see? “And the sight of the star filled them with delight and going into the place they saw the child with his mother Mary.” Maybe like the shepherds and the three visitors from the East (a place where the deep spirituality and where major religions originated), the bishop was coming to find Christ in the poorest of places and to be with him.

There is a saying in Swahili: “Bunadamu wote ni ndugu zangu Afrika ni moja” (As human beings we are all sisters and brothers; Africa is one). I am called to serve in the charity homes – the Houses of Compassion – for it is in the sharing of compassion that the true meaning of Epiphany is found. My favorite prayer of Saint Teresa of Avila is our common calling as we celebrate this feast today:

“Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which God looks compassion on this world. Christ has no body on earth but yours.”

May we let this light of Christ within us shine forth to all living beings, as we live meaningfully in sharing God’s compassion and in the search for lasting peace that can make us the one family of the world.

Let us live epiphany not only on this day but every day of our lives. AMEN!

For more information:

While the election ended in November, our work must continue. It is important to put our concerns for people living in forgotten communities around the globe before President-elect Obama and the new House and Senate. Read Maryknoll’s important policy goals outline in “Loving our neighbor in a shrinking world” and schedule an appointment with your new representatives today.

Email for a copy, or find the election guide here:
www.maryknollogc.org/2008elections/index.htm

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