

Year A, January 15, 2017
2 Epiphany
Christ Church, Mexia

Do you like the Peanuts cartoons? I've always found a lot of wisdom or inspiration in them. And one time Charlie Brown was talking with his friend, Linus, and he said: "You see, Linus, it goes all the way back to the beginning. The moment I was born and set foot on the stage of life they took one look at me and said, 'Not right for the part.'" Ouch, talk about an identity crisis.

There are a lot of ways we can identify ourselves. For a good part of my life, I seemed to be known simply as Nash's Dad. And a lot of our identity can be connected to our relations – though sometimes it might be complicated. Years ago, when I was in the Army and stationed in Washington, DC, a young couple lived next door and we became acquainted. One day, they explained that sometime after they were married the wife's brother had married the husband's mother. Wow, the wife's brother was now her father-in-law. The husband's brother-in-law was now his step-father and his mother was also his sister-in-law. Well, you can play with that for quite a while, and it gets more interesting when considering children and grandchildren.

But family isn't our only identity. Gender may come into play. Nelly Ptashkina says, for example: "A woman with a woman's viewpoint is of more value than when she forgets she is a woman and begins to act like a man." And often we identify ourselves by politics, Republican, Democrat, liberal, conservative, progressive, etc. Sometimes our identity can be related to our possessions. I don't know about women, but it seems that young males, say 18-25 especially, have their identity tied to the kind of car that they drive. Later it may be the kind of work, doctor, lawyer, etc., or position, VP, manager... Suffice it to say that our identity can be a complex matter. We may view ourselves and identify ourselves differently over time as we develop and grow, or depending upon the circumstances in which we find ourselves at the moment.

Eric Hoffer in his first book, *A Passionate State of Mind*, notes: "The times of drastic change are times of passion. We can never be fit and ready for that which is wholly new. We have to adjust ourselves, and every radical adjustment is a crisis of self-esteem: we undergo a test; we have to prove ourselves. A population subjected to drastic change

is thus a population of misfits, and misfits live and breathe in an atmosphere of passion.”

And that seems to be happening so much to us today - we live more than ever in times of change. Passionate misfits then may believe that they have to accumulate more and more wealth in order to maintain some importance or identity; or they may believe they have to purchase a gun and shoot someone with whom they disagree or see as the object of their distress, or just shoot people at random in order to feel powerful; - these are people who tend to be basically dissatisfied. But as Hoffer also notes in his book, “A poignant dissatisfaction, whatever be its cause, is at bottom a dissatisfaction with ourselves” and that “the passionate attitude is less a response to stimuli from without than an emanation of an inner dissatisfaction.” And although I used extreme examples previously, don’t we all experience some level of being a misfit at times, and don’t we all pursue various avenues in the thought that somehow it will allow us to overcome that feeling?

I think the major problems that we experience, and that are of our making for the most part, derive from the fact that we forget or temporarily lose sight of the fact that we are children of God. We have lost that particular concept of identity in trying to adjust ourselves to fit in an ever-changing world. People, especially those in developed nations where the standard of living has risen considerably, seem to believe that through science and wealth and power and other means that they can control everything, and therefore they have no use, no need, for God. And yet the world’s problems are still there, and some are getting worse, despite the illusion that we can somehow control them. Our worldly power simply doesn’t appear to work as well as we suppose it does.

John’s entire first chapter is about insuring that people knew who John the Baptist was - and wasn’t - and who Jesus was. Jesus’ identity, knowing who he was, was very important to his ministry and it is important for us to know today. “Out of so much love for the world, God sends his only Son to seek us out and save us. In English, the verbs to save, to salvage, to salve come from the same etymological root. Jesus has come to save us, to salvage our lives, to salve our wounds.” (Br. Curtis Almquist) That is good news!

Son of God, Lamb of God, the Word made flesh - the eternal God, yet for a while fully human. Jesus’ identity was important to him and it is important to us. And what is your identity - how do you identify yourself? I urge you not to forget that you are a child of God and to

always be a true disciple of Jesus. As L. Nishan Bakalian reminds us: "In the town of Stepanavan, Armenia, I met a woman whom everyone called 'Palasan's Wife.' She had her own name, of course, but townspeople called her by her husband's name to show her great honor. When the devastating 1988 earthquake struck Armenia, it was nearly noon, and Palasan was at work. He rushed to the elementary school where his son was a student. The façade was already crumbling, but he entered the building and began pushing children outside to safety. After Palasan had managed to help 28 children out, an aftershock hit that completely collapsed the school building and killed him. So, the people of Stepanavan honor his memory and his young widow by calling her Palasan's wife. Sometimes a person's greatest honor is not who he or she is but to whom he or she is related (or associated). The highest honor of any believer is to be called a disciple of Jesus Christ, who laid down his life for all people."

So always remember who Jesus was, and remember who you are. Of all the ways to identify yourself – be a Christian first. Is there any better identity?

In the name of the One God - the Creator, the Word, and the Spirit.

Amen.