

One of the television shows that I've been following lately is titled "Shark Tank." There are about half-a-dozen "self-made millionaire and billionaire investors" who are the 'sharks,' and who listen as small business people bring their product ideas to the Shark Tank. Most of the time, the 'contestants' in the "Shark Tank" are looking for money; some times they want to form a partnership with one or more of the 'sharks.'

In a sense, the 'sharks' on "Shark Tank" exemplify the "American Dream." Demonstrating that anyone can make it, and that hard work pays off.

Yet, in reality, everyone needs some help at different times. We go to family and relatives, friends and business associates, even banks and credit unions. Or, I suppose, if you're so bold - to the 'sharks' in the "Shark Tank."

Last week, we celebrated the Solemnity of the Epiphany. Three Magi from the East come to Bethlehem by following a star that appeared to signal the birth of a new King. The word 'Epiphany' is from the Greek - epi-phaneia - an "outward appearance" or a 'manifestation.'

Traditionally there are three 'manifestations' of Jesus that we celebrate all together at this time liturgically. The tradition has endured in the Churches of the East, and in the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council, we again have them all together in the western Church.

In the first 'manifestation' which was the "Epiphany" - we reflect on how the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. The striking miracle of the Incarnation of "God with us" in the newborn Infant Jesus.

The second 'manifestation' is what we celebrate this weekend - the Baptism of the Lord. In this 'manifestation,' after Our Lord has been baptized by John (the Baptist) in the Jordan River;

*heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon him
in bodily form like a dove.*

And a voice came from heaven,

*"You are my beloved Son;
with you I am well pleased."*

This second 'manifestation' of Christ begins His three-year ministry of preaching and teaching - culminating in His great Paschal Sacrifice on the Cross - which we re-present today in the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

The third 'manifestation,' which we will hear in next week's readings is the "Wedding at Cana." The details of which, I'll leave to next week's preaching.

But these three 'manifestations' - (1) the entire Christmas mystery from the Incarnation, through Jesus' birth and the coming of the Magi, (2) His Baptism in the Jordan River with the descent of the Holy Spirit and the Voice of the Father, (3) and the miraculous multiplication of wine at the Wedding at Cana - were seen as all tied together.

A simple way to understand the unity in these three 'manifestations' is to recognize that they parallel the three Sacraments of Initiation.

In the Nativity, the Second Person of the Trinity becomes an infant ... the Son of God becomes a human being. In Baptism, the first of the three Sacraments of Initiation, through the waters of our own Baptism, we are made the children of God - and the adopted brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ.

In the Baptism of Jesus, everything was going just like any that John the Baptist was doing - until afterward, the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus, and the Father's Voice proclaims Him as the Beloved Son. In the Sacrament of Confirmation - we too are strengthened through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, we are confirmed as the beloved daughters and sons of God, and we are configured for our own mission ... our own apostolate ... and in a way, we are sent out to spread the Gospel in the world.

And finally, the Wedding at Cana is a type of the Messianic Banquet - of which the Eucharist is our share in that Banquet. True, it is a Sacrifice ... and it represents the Sacrifice of Calvary in an un-bloody way ... but from this altar ... from this table - we receive the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ - under the appearance of bread and wine ... as our spiritual sustenance ... to allow us to be a Light for the World and to be Fishers of Men ... [and women :-)] ... in the "Shark Tank" of the world

Today is also the beginning of Vocations Awareness week. And it is through these three Sacraments - Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist - that we receive the spiritual call that make us messengers of the Good News out in the world ... in the way that we live our lives ... and in answer to the calls we have received.

As we approach this altar to receive the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ - let us ask for the spiritual investments we need to bear our crosses and live out our own Christian duties more fully. Grace and mercy flow from this altar and are the spiritual nourishment that we need to make things work. Let us rely more and more on God - asking through prayer for what it is that we need in our daily lives.