

Homily – Mt 2: 1-12

The Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord

Thursday, 06th January 2022

Today, we celebrate the solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord. That is, ‘the manifestation of Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God and the Saviour of the world’. And every year on this feast, we encounter the story that really defines Christianity, the story of pilgrims on a journey. We meet the Magi, coming in search of the King in order to pay him homage: to honour Him and to worship Him and to open their treasures, giving gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Now, the Magi in Mathew’s Gospel are willing to travel a long distance in order to adore the New Born King. These Non – Jewish foreigners are among the First to recognize that something wonderful is happening for all people in Bethlehem. They looked at their world and they looked at the people in their world and they knew God has lots of ways of revealing Himself in the lives of people.

And those Magi notice something in the sky: a star, a light, brightness in the darkness, and what do they tell Herod? We saw and we came. They followed God’s lead, and they came to the place where God was in the flesh with His Mother Mary.

Now, King Herod and all His experts too had the chance to look up at the same night sky as the Magi. And if they looked up at the stars, they were seeing exactly the same thing that the Magi were seeing. But they don't want to come to Bethlehem. And even worse, they have the Magi standing right in front of them with the good news that the Messiah has been born. But still, they don't come to Bethlehem. They stayed put where they were. They stayed put where they thought they had power. They stayed put where they thought they had control.

But here, the wise men were willing to go a longer distance to see the New Born King. They wanted to adore Him. And so, they went over to see Him. But Herod, his chief priests and his scribes don't go to see the New Born King. Herod says that he will. But he doesn't want to go to pay him homage. Instead, he wants to send his soldiers to do him harm. And he refuses to go, because He is afraid. Herod knows that if Christ truly is in the world, then his world is about to change. Herod is afraid his power will be lost, and his plans will be abandoned and his definition of success is going to melt away in the light of this child.

Now, how about us? Are we like the Magi willing to follow the star to draw nearer to the King? Or do we prefer to be on the side of Herod and His experts?

Pope Francis is so powerful when he says: “There are many of us who call ourselves Christians, but we actually act more like Herod and the Scribes.” That is, we know that Jesus Christ is available and tangible in our world, but we keep Him at arm’s length. We keep our safe distance. We refuse to go over and see and get too close because we know that once we encounter the living Christ, our hearts and minds and our world will change and must change. And many of us like King Herod don’t want to give up the control and the safety of the little lives that we have crafted.

And we don’t have to travel to Bethlehem to see Him. We can in fact encounter the living Christ right here in the Eucharist, in the sacraments, on every page of the Gospel if we dare to read it and pray it. We can encounter Him in the flesh, ‘in the poor, in our neighbour, in the hungry, if we will but serve them’.

In 1895, Henry van Dyke wrote the story, “The Other Wise Man,” telling of a fourth wise man called Artaban. Our hero is not mentioned in the Gospel because he missed the caravan. He got to Bethlehem too late to see the Baby Jesus. But Artaban did make it in time to save one of the Holy Innocents by bribing a soldier.

For 33 years, Artaban searched for Jesus. Sadly enough, he could never find Jesus, but all the while the Fourth wise man fed the hungry and helped the poor. Finally, he reached the Holy city of Jerusalem, old, weary and dispirited. A number of crucifixions were taking place the day he arrived. To his great shock he heard that Jesus, the King of the Jews was among those being executed.

He hurried to the hill of execution, thinking he could perhaps save the life of Jesus with the pearl he had in hand paying it as a ransom. But then, on his way to Calvary, Artaban met a girl who was fleeing from a band of soldiers. The girl hurriedly told him her story. Her father had incurred large debts. As a result, she was being sold into slavery. Artaban took out his pearl, gave it to the soldiers, and the girl was allowed to go free. But now, he had to face his King empty handed.

Just then the sky began to get dark. And an earthquake shook the ground under his feet and a stone struck Artaban. Mortally wounded he struggled onwards. But he died before reaching the hill of execution. And, he never quite succeeded in catching up with his King. But before he breathed his last, he heard a Voice saying: "When you helped the least of my children, you helped me. Meet me in Heaven!"

Well, Artaban had offered Jesus his very self, his own heart. He had been making God present in his community for years by helping others.

Dear friends, God is to be found in human relationships, to be found in the suffering humanity. Let this great feast enable us to become God's epiphanies, making His love present in the world around us by our acts of love and kindness. God bless you all, **Amen.**