

Solemnity Of The Epiphany Of The Lord – 1/7/18

My dear people of God: Allow me to start our reflection today with our beautiful Responsorial Psalm: *Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.*

Our responsorial psalm would sum up the entire mission of our Lord Jesus Christ: that is to make all peoples adore Him and be a part of the redeemed.

He started the “no soul left out” policy. Our Catholic faith tells us that Christ came to save all humankind. Jesus desires that nobody should be excluded. Back in those days, Gentiles (meaning - non Jews) were considered by the Jews as not qualified to enter heaven. Heaven was the exclusive domain of the Jews. But God desires that the entire humankind be saved. That is why He inspired the Magi – people from the East – who have studied the celestial bodies to search for the newborn King, born of Jewish parents. This King is not just any king but the Lord Himself, the King of the Universe.

Brothers and sisters, please understand that these Magi were not Jews. But being the first non-Jews to visit the newborn King, they significantly represent the pagan world.

Saint Paul in our second reading says it beautifully to the Ephesians: *You have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for your benefit, namely, that the mystery was made known to me by revelation. It was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: that the Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.*

We all are recipients of that same letter too. We are coheirs of heaven. We stand equal to the Chosen People as far as the heart of Jesus is concerned because that heart beats with love for all humankind.

Now, let us go to the First Reading and the Gospel. I love to see the connection between the last part of the First Reading which is from Isaiah 60:6 {*all from Sheba shall come bearing gold and frankincense, and proclaiming the praises of the LORD*} and the penultimate part of today's Gospel from Matthew 2:11 {*Then, they opened their coffers and*

presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.}. Such prophecy was fulfilled in a very catechetical way. The pagan world worshipped the King as was prophesied by Isaiah and its fulfillment was chronicled by Matthew. Now, we are a part of that pagan world represented by the Magi.

Talking about the gifts that the Magi gave to the infant King, one of my favorite priests used to tell this story: "An 8 year old asked, "How come the kings brought perfume to Jesus? What kind of gift is that for a baby?" His 9 year old sister answered, "Haven't you ever smelled a barn? With dirty animals around, Mary needed something to freshen the air."

In its entirety, the first reading goes this way: *Rise up in splendor, Jerusalem! Your light has come, the glory of the Lord shines upon you. See clouds cover the peoples; but upon you the LORD shines, and over you appears his glory. Nations shall walk by your light, and kings by your shining radiance. Raise your eyes and look about; they all gather and come to you: your sons come from afar, and your daughters in the arms of their nurses.*

Then you shall be radiant at what you see, your heart shall throb and overflow, for the riches of the sea shall be emptied out before you, the wealth of nations shall be brought to you. Caravans of camels shall fill you, dromedaries from Midian and Ephah; all from Sheba shall come bearing gold and frankincense, and proclaiming the praises of the LORD.

The first part of the first reading clearly tells us that Jerusalem must be a special place in God's plan. No matter what presidents and leaders of other nations say, we know that God's caring and protecting hand is obviously upon Jerusalem. The spiritual growth of the world is connected with that LIGHT that shines in Jerusalem.

The second part of the first reading tells us about gifts. Please know that Christ does not want costly gifts from us. What He wants is a reformation of ourselves. Their transformation now complete, the Wise Men returned home a lot wiser to begin work in their own kingdoms. So must ours be as we go back to our respective worlds today.

Besides transformation, I wish to bring to your loving attention our fears and anxieties. I wish to immediately add anger and guilt. The four things

that ruin our relationship with God could be summed up as AGFA-anger, guilt, fear, and anxiety.

Herod was greatly troubled (meaning anxious). Actually, that was an understatement. He was enraged (meaning angry). His paranoia and fear were at record levels. And all of Jerusalem was greatly troubled along with him. The Magi said that they had seen the STAR of the new-born King. The Magi knew that the CHILD was greater than them, so they had followed His star. The heavens were pointing to the Child. He was Someone the heavens had sent. So they gave Him homage. They had no anxiety over a newborn King who might be a threat to them. On the contrary, they felt more complete and fulfilled.

People of God: we give homage to the King of kings, our Lord. We recognize that He is infinitely greater than any president or prime minister. We recognize that He is our Lord, the one who governs our lives. We hold our hands together in prayer, placing our hands in His and surrendering to Him. We pay Him homage. The gesture of prayer with our hands together or our fingers interlocked is a gesture of homage. When we pray using this gesture we are saying, "I belong to God." And we will find our utmost fulfillment.

Finally, let me say something about the Magi relying on the STAR and then consulting Herod; and then Herod consulting the priests. The Magi were wise men. They sought whatever help was available. Why? Because they realized that this Child could draw them beyond the limits that the world imposes to that place where His life makes all life complete. They did not separate faith and reason; science and religion. They were early scientists, studying the configuration of stars and the movement of planets.

This is a good moment to talk about something affecting young people: the perceived conflict between science and religion. We have a big challenge - our children perceive a conflict between faith and reason. It is only a perceived conflict because when you think about it, it doesn't make sense. After all, we have plenty of scientists who are also people of faith: biologists, medical professionals and astronomers who attend Mass and pray. The bottom line is that the conflict between science and faith is more perception than reality.

Even though people keep bringing up Galileo, real conflict is rare. But perceived conflict persists. People who study popular culture note a trend to (quote) "see atheism as '*smart*' and faith as a '*fairy tale*.'

When a child concludes he is an atheist he becomes one of the 'smart people'. It's like getting a college degree without having to open a book. We are up against a culture that looks down on faith - even considers it dangerous or narrow-minded. But before someone dismisses the faith, he should consider what Louis Pasteur said. You remember him, the man who discovered the principle of vaccination, microbial fermentation and pasteurization. Pasteur said, "the idea of the Infinite (God) imposes itself on the mind and baffles the mind's effort to comprehend it." We need both faith and reason.

This brings us back to the Magi - those early scientist astronomers. Like great thinkers, the Magi did not separate faith and reason; science and religion. The Magi searched the heavens and discovered some new configuration of stars, comets, and planets. Their curiosity brought them to the manger. Herod and the priests stayed comfortably in the big city while the Magi went to Bethlehem and got rewarded: *"The saw the child with Mary His mother. They prostrated themselves and did him homage."*

Each one of us has been led by a STAR. Each one of us has been brought by GOD to the assent of faith. It may have been because we searched as adults and gradually found faith but it could also be because we were brought up as Catholics by our parents; that in our earliest childhood we came to a knowledge and love of God.

Ironically, as we grow older, we do not always grow wiser; quite often the preoccupations of raising children, keeping our jobs and paying a mortgage get in the way and cloud our vision. What started off with certainty, but such certainty and firmness of faith can, with the vicissitudes of life, easily fade away into disinterest and laxity. What we need then is re-conversion. We all need to look for that STAR once more.

Let us think today about those Wise Men and about how wise they were. They asked God to lead them. And their journey was not merely a journey by land but it was also a journey of faith. And God revealed Himself to them in the person of the Child Jesus.

Hidden under one form or another there is always a star glittering out there in the darkness. If we constantly look for that star and follow where God leads us again and again we will encounter Christ in all sorts of different disguises until one day we meet Him face to face and the door is ultimately opened for us to live with Him forever. Amen.