

Epiphany

Holy Rosary Cathedral

7 January 2018

Dear brother priests and deacons; parishioners; and a special warm welcome to those who are visiting the Cathedral this morning:

Introduction

Today the light of Christ, which radiated from the manger in Bethlehem, blazes out to enlighten the whole world. This is the feast of God's manifestation of himself – his “showing” himself – in the Child Jesus to representatives from the whole world. No longer does he just show himself to the people of Israel, like the shepherds, but now also to the Gentiles, the non-Jews, represented by the wise men or Magi from the East. All are called to be” members of the same body [of Christ], and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus” (Eph 3:6). The Son of God became man so that men and women of every place, culture, mentality, and lifestyle might follow the path opened to eternal life. Jesus is for everyone.¹ “He does not reserve his love to the privileged few, but offers it to all.”²

Three Lessons from the Magi

Today's Gospel account of the coming of the wise men to worship “the child with Mary, his mother” (Mt 2:11) has much to teach us. Let's

¹ Cf. Benedict XVI, Homily (6 January 2013).

² Francis, Angelus (6 January 2015).

take a look at the light their attitude sheds on how we should live the Christian life.

Life Is a Journey to God

The most remarkable attitude of the wise men “from the East” (Mt 1:1) was the restlessness of their hearts. They driven by their search for God and embarked on a long pilgrimage to find “the child who had been born king of the Jews” (Mt 1:2) – an unlikely quest given their non-Jewish origins.

Not satisfied with their wealth and their respectable place in society, they were looking for something more from life. They desired more than possessions, pleasure and power. They were men who sought God and were on the way towards him.³ The magi experienced longing and desire, not self-satisfaction. And they had courage, courage to set out towards the unfamiliar and the unknown.

The outward journey they undertook was an expression of their inward journey, the inner pilgrimage of their hearts..

The wise men, I hope, represent us: those who long for God, who yearn, at the deepest level of their being, for their heavenly homeland. They personify “all those who in their lives have not let their hearts be

³ Cf. Benedict XVI, Homily (6 January 2013).

anaesthetized”⁴ by hostility or indifference.

The wise men “teach us not to be content with a life of mediocrity, of ‘playing it safe,’ but to let ourselves be attracted always by what is good, true and beautiful . . . by God, who is all of this, and so much more!”⁵

Contrast this with the attitude of Herod whom, I hope, does *not* represent us. He and his advisors are stuck in a palace in Jerusalem. The chief priests and scribes, for example, know the Scriptures and are able to give the right answer regarding the place of the Messiah’s birth (cf. Mt 2:5-6). But they do not bother to go to Bethlehem, which is only a few kilometers away, to find the long-awaited Messiah.⁶

Who are we like then? Is our life wrapped up in self-satisfaction and indifference to Jesus, or do we see our life as a journey, a pilgrimage toward God?

Just yesterday Pope Francis said: “Jesus allows himself to be found by those who seek him, but to find him we need to get up and go, not sit around but take risks, not stand still, but set out. Jesus makes demands: he tells those who seek him to leave behind the armchair of worldly

⁴ Francis, Homily (6 January 2017).

⁵ Francis, Homily (6 January 2014).

⁶ Francis, Angelus (6 January 2018).

comforts and the reassuring warmth of hearth and home. Following Jesus is not a polite etiquette to be observed, but a journey to be undertaken.”⁷

Christ Lights Our Pilgrim Way

The magi tell us not only to strike out on a journey to God, but to follow and accept all the guidance that is given us along the way. For the wise men, this meant following the star which led them to the goal of their quest.

They saw the star because they raised their eyes to heaven. That’s should inspire us *not* to make do with looking at the ground, content to have our health, a little money and a bit of entertainment, to be swept along by life, like dry branches in the wind. The magi were not content with just getting by, with keeping afloat. They understood that to truly live, we need a lofty goal – and we have one: eternal life! So we need to to keep looking up.⁸

The wise men invite us to look up, not to the flashing and often dazzling lights of the world, but to follow a steady light, a gentle light that does not fade, because it is not of this world. This light comes from heaven and it shines in our hearts. What is this? “This true light is the light of the Lord, or rather, it is the Lord himself. He is our light: a light

⁷ Francis, Homily (6 January 2018).

⁸ Cf. Francis, Homily (6 January 2018).

that does not dazzle, but accompanies us and lights up our way and bestows a unique joy.”⁹ It is a great kindness of the Lord to let us know that we are guided by the light of the Gospel as it is proclaimed in the sure teaching of the Church. This is the light that, when we follow it, gives us peace.

Trust in God

A third lesson, but one closely tied to the other two, that the magi teach us is to have faith that the path where the Lord leads us is a good path. On reaching their destination, they “were overwhelmed with joy” (Mt 2:10). They had trusted in God and, even though a Child in humble surroundings was not what they had been expecting, they kept faith in the what was leading them forward. We know that it is not an inanimate star but the living God who was leading them to their goal.

We might think that they would have been disappointed, or even shocked, at the ordinariness of a young mother cradling an Infant as the culmination of their quest. Instead, as the true wise men that they were, they were open to mystery, to what was given them. And with their symbolic gifts, they showed their gratitude and that they recognized Jesus not only as the King of the Jews, but also the King of all the peoples.¹⁰

⁹ Francis, Angelus (6 January 2017).

¹⁰ Cf. Benedict XVI, Angelus (6 January 2010).

Led by the Spirit, they come to realize “that God does not manifest himself in the power of this world, but speaks to us in the humbleness of his love.”¹¹ Now the wise men were able to see that God’s ways are not as we imagine them or as we might wish them to be.

So it is with us. God shows us his face in often unexpected, and perhaps even unwanted, ways: in disappointments, in challenges, in brothers and sisters whom we might prefer to ignore. We have to be prepared for such surprises, and not think such occasions are without his presence. The magi remind us that ours is a God whose power is revealed in mercy and whose strength is revealed in love.

Conclusion

Today’s feast, then, urges us to keep on our journey with faith, confident that it is God who is leading us to our final destiny and that on the way to him we are even now called to kneel down and pay him homage (cf. Mt 2:11). That’s what we do now in our celebration of the Eucharist, the act of thanksgiving he has given us so that we might worship in spirit and in truth.

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB
Archbishop of Vancouver

¹¹ Cf. Francis, Homily (6 January 2015).