

Epiphany

St. Mary's, Vancouver

5 January 2019

Dear Father Guy, dear parishioners, dear young people who are bound for World Youth Day in Panama, and brothers and sisters in Christ:

Introduction

It's always a joy to celebrate the Eucharist with the faith community here at the vibrant parish of St. Mary's which is pastored with such energy and dedication by the Dominican Fathers. It is especially a pleasure today to be with the young men and women who will soon be on their way to join hundreds of thousands of others who will be in Panama for World Youth Day. We wish them Godspeed on their pilgrimage, whether they will spend some time doing good works, learning about our faith, praying and celebrating the Vigil and Mass with the Holy Father.

Dear young friends: we promise to accompany you with our prayers that your participation in this great event will bring you even closer to Jesus and strengthen your commitment to his Church.

Epiphany

In today's celebration of the Epiphany, the light of Christ, which radiated from the manger in Bethlehem, blazes out to enlighten the whole world. No longer does the Infant King 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

people 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 he opened to eternal life.¹ Jesus offers his love to everyone.²

While not referring to our young people’s pilgrimage to Panama, today’s Gospel asks us take a journey, to accompany the Magi on their journey to find “the child who had been born king of the Jews” (Mt 2:2). I remember as a child, and this is the custom in many churches even today, that in the manger scene the wise men were at first placed far from the crib, and then, day-by-day, we would move the figures closer and closer to Jesus, Mary and Joseph. The wise men were on a journey to centre stage, to the stable in Bethlehem.

Journey of the Magi

We are all like them, not just our World Youth Day pilgrims. Each of us is on a journey, a pilgrimage. That is what our life is: a journey which is to lead us to draw close Christ in this world and to be with him forever in heaven.

The wise men began their journey because they followed a sign

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

² Cf. Francis, Angelus (6 January 2015).

which was given to them. As men of science who scrutinized the heavens, the wise men observed a star which was so unusual that it called them to leave their homeland and set out to an unknown destination.³

What drove them to leave their wealth and respectable positions in society? These men had restless hearts and were searching for something – or someone – who would give them more than the possessions, pleasure and power they enjoyed. “Their outward pilgrimage was an expression of their inward journey, the inner pilgrimage of their heart.”⁴ The Magi experienced longing and desire, not self-satisfaction.

And so, when they saw the star, they did not hesitate to leave the security of their home. They had the courage to follow that star: to set out towards the unknown, on a journey no doubt filled with uncertainty. Wise though they might have been, they didn’t have the answers at the outset. They were willing to take a risk for their hearts had been stirred.

The Magi remind us, whether we recognize it or not, that everyone is on a pilgrimage in their own life to know the living God, to experience his care for us, and to receive his mercy and his love. The Magi “teach us not to be content with a life of mediocrity, of ‘playing it safe,’ but to

³ Cf. Benedict XVI, Homily (6 January 2008).

⁴ Cf. Benedict XVI, Homily (6 January 2013).

let ourselves be attracted always by what is good, true and beautiful . . . by God, who is all of this, and so much more!”⁵ Using his typical colourful expression, Pope Francis remarked just last year: “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 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.”⁶

Undoubtedly the Magi met opposition in their home country for their “foolishness” in wanting to follow a star to an unknown destination. Likewise, we should not be surprised if we experience scorn. Around us there might well be those who mock our pilgrimage of faith, saying that we are only dreaming, that risking everything on an unseen God is ridiculous, and that it’s better to get as much out of life as you can, and not wasting your time on asking questions about the meaning of life.

The End of the Journey: Finding the Child

The star that guided the wise men finally came to rest above the

⁵ Francis, Homily (6 January 2014).

⁶ Francis, Homily (6 January 2018).

place where the Infant was (cf. Mt 2:9). At the sight of him they “were overwhelmed – filled – with joy” (Mt 2:10).

Dear friends: that same profound, overwhelming joy should also fill our hearts when we think how close the Lord is to us. The Magi’s response to that joy was to kneel down and pay him homage: to adore him (cf. Mt 2:11).

You 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 the mystery, to the end of the journey that had been ready for them. They did not recoil with discouragement, but instead, with their symbolic gifts, they recognized Jesus as the King of the Jews, but also the King of all the peoples.⁷

By their act of adoration, the Magi showed their willingness to change their ideas about God’s true majesty. Now they were also able to see that God’s ways are seldom as we imagine them or as we might wish them to be. Ours is a God whose power is his mercy and whose strength is his love. In the same way, our ideas about who God is often need to be purified.

You and I are on our own personal journey of faith but, at the same

⁷ Cf. Benedict XVI, Angelus (6 January 2010).

time, with the little light that we carry within us, we can and must be a help to those alongside us, and help those for whom finding the way that leads to Christ is even more difficult than it is for us.⁸

That is the evangelizing mission of the Church. If we live with Jesus whom we have found, then we will become shining stars for others, pointing out to them, even if dimly, the path to true life.⁹

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 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 to us, so that we might worship in spirit and in truth.

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB
Archbishop of Vancouver

⁸ Cf. Benedict XVI, Angelus (6 January 2008).

⁹ Cf. Benedict XVI, Homily (6 January 2013).