

Homily for the Feast of the Epiphany of the Lord

January 3, 2021

Seekers

Welcome all virtual participants to this celebration of the Feast of the Epiphany of the Lord, traditionally held on January 6th but transferred in Canada, usually to the preceding Sunday. This is the day we commemorate the arrival of the Wise Men, representatives of the greater gentile world, who offered their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to the newborn King.

In Christian folklore the Wise Men are numbered three (because of the three gifts) and given names—Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar. They are often portrayed as representing the three continents of the ancient world: Melchior from Europe; Balthasar from Africa; and Caspar from Asia. They thus symbolize that Christ calls all people of the world to Himself. Since the early Middle Ages they have been depicted as kings to show that even earthly sovereigns kneel before the Lord of lords.

In Scripture they are called Magi or Wise Men. Certainly they were students of the stars. Astrologers, perhaps. We really don't know much *about* these strangers from the East. But we can certainly learn some important things *from* them.

The first lesson we can learn is that, for those who are truly and sincerely searching for God, God will in some way reward them. The Wise Men were seekers. They were not content with just enjoying their comfortable lifestyles and immersing themselves in their social

milieu. They were looking and longing for something greater; for God's hand in the world. And their perseverance paid off.

Many people today claim to be spiritual seekers – and hopefully they are – but they must ask themselves are they honestly looking for the God-who-is, or for some alternative to Him? Are they intently searching for God or intentionally looking in other directions?

Second lesson, the Wise Men realized spiritual truth was not just something subjective but something objective; not just something inside themselves but outside themselves as well. Not just something personal and private but universal. Their eyes were cast outward.

And recognizing that spiritual truth was not of their own making, they allowed it to lead them into the unknown, on a long and arduous journey that brought them to a King like none they could ever have imagined. A King not living in a palace, a King without a throne, a King with no apparent kingdom.

Many today see spirituality as largely a private, interior journey. But this runs the risk of easily becoming self-referential; a type of exaltation of the ego. *My* spirituality based on how *I* see myself and the world, what interests *me*, what *I* hold important. There is no real movement beyond oneself, no conversion of mind and heart to Ultimate Reality. At most we pick and choose things from various philosophies and religions but according to what standard? Our personal preferences and popular fashion? Truth as a matter of taste!

Third lesson, the Wise Men used their intellects and learning to assist their search, but they recognized their own limitations. Their intellectual abilities would only bring them so far, beyond that they needed help, both human and divine. The divine help came first in the form of a star and then in Holy Scriptures. The human help came in the chief priests and scribes who interpreted the Scriptures.

In our search for meaning and truth do we recognize our own limitations? Or do we think we have all that it takes to get the answers we need? Do we realize that our own benightedness can lead us off track or down blind alleys? Do we humbly acknowledge that help is needed, and do we seek it out where it may be found? That is what God's self-revelation is about; help from above. The writings that contain that revelation we call Holy Scriptures. But any texts need interpreting, and so God also gave us the Church as its authorized interpreter. Both are meant to lead us to Him: to reveal to us the God-who-is, why He made us, and how to follow Him. The meaning of life.

Another important lesson from the Wise Men; do we recognize that our spiritual journey is actually a two-way street? Our search for God, yes, but also God's search for us. The Wise Men did not so much find God as He found them. He put the star in the sky for them to see, He gave them some understanding of what it meant, He prompted them to leave their country to follow it, He led them to Jerusalem and then to Bethlehem, then to Himself.

Our own spiritual search has been made easier than we think. For it is not about pressing on in spite of an indifferent cosmos, crying out for

answers into an impenetrable void. Rather, God has plotted the course and given us directions, if we are but willing to follow. Are we? The Venerable Fulton Sheen once quipped: “Ever since the days of Adam, man has been hiding from God and saying, ‘God is hard to find.’”

God came into the world in Jesus Christ to make it that much easier to find Him. “*No one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him*” (Matthew 11:27b). God is not playing a game of Hide and Seek, He is the Good Shepherd looking for His lost sheep.

While God has revealed Himself for us, He is not doing so simply to satisfy some intellectual curiosity, but to bring us into right relationship with Him. When the Wise Men entered the house and gazed upon the Christ Child, “*they knelt down and paid Him homage*” – they were not there to study Him but to worship Him. God is not some puzzle to be solved but a Person to be loved.

To find God is to find the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, the very source and summit of life and love, our ultimate meaning, and to be awe-struck by what we are compared to Who He is. And yet to realize that He condescended to become like us so that we could be united to Him. The appropriate response is to bow down in thankfulness, reverence, and to worship. And then to give to the God who loves us the most precious gift we have, ourselves.

This leads to the final and probably the most terrifying lesson that we learn from the spiritual journey of the Wise Men. Once you have

encountered Christ, recognized Who He is, given your life to Him, you can never go back to the way things were before. The Wise Men had to go home by a different road.

Our lives must now take a different path. We cannot go on with “business as usual.” We can no longer live and act as if God does not exist, as if our lives are strictly our own, as if our worldly goals are all that matters. Our journey has led us to God. Now we must take into account His will for us. We must be transformed in thought, word and action. Our new gold standard is love of God and love of neighbour.

If the Wise Men can find Christ, then the way is open for anyone of good will; who is disposed to making the spiritual journey. But it demands effort, humility, and sacrifice. The Wise Men overcame barriers of distance, culture, language, race, religion, not to speak of the hostility of a king and indifference of religious leaders. It wasn't easy for them, but they did it. And if they can do it, then potentially so can anyone else, *especially with our help!*

For the Bethlehem star is no longer in the sky to be followed, but we Christians are here on earth. We are now “*the light of the world*” (Matthew 5:14) that Christ is using to guide people to Himself. Let your light shine before others. God bless.