

Homily of the Epiphany of the Lord, Year B

King Herod represents the worst and extreme case of jealousy and envy. The birth of Jesus made the angels sing, made the shepherds and the Magi rejoice; but made Herod to become deeply troubled, and he immediately planned to kill Jesus. Jesus was not to be an earthly king to take over Herod's kingdom. It is, therefore, difficult to understand why Herod reacted that way. It is, equally, difficult to understand why some people are saddened by some other people's progress. There are cases where jealousy and envy had led to destruction of innocent lives and property.

The word 'Epiphany' comes from the Greek word epiphania meaning 'revelation,' or 'manifestation.' An English dictionary defines epiphany as a sudden and profound understanding, or realization, or disclosure of something. Before the arrival of the Magi (the wise men), it was only the shepherds who had known that Jesus had been born. The angel of the Lord brought the good news to the shepherds. The shepherds returned to their flock after visiting Jesus, Mary and Joseph (Luke 2: 8-20). It was not recorded that the shepherds announced the good news to anyone. As we have read in today's Gospel, it was the Magi who announced the birth of Jesus to King Herod and his officials. From then, the news became public. This is one of the reasons why the visit of the Magi is called Epiphany, meaning the disclosure or revelation of the Lord.

The Magi were astronomers who observed the stars and other celestial bodies. They saw a spectacular star which they rightly interpreted to mean the birth of a great king. The three men were from different parts of the world. According to tradition, Melchior came from Persia (present Iran), Balthazar came from Arabia and Gaspar from India. Following the star, the three men arrived in Jerusalem at the same time, and together went to see King Herod. This is its own miracle and mystery. The Magi, who were non-Jews, was an indication that it was very important from the very beginning; the birth of Jesus was also revealed to the non-Jewish world. Each of the Magi came with a gift: gold, frankincense and myrrh. The gifts further revealed who Jesus was. Gold symbolized Christ our king. Frankincense symbolized Christ our priest and myrrh symbolized Christ's death.

I am sure that it was not only the three men that saw the star. Many people would have seen the same star, but it meant nothing to them. Probably too, many people knew that the star signified something special but did nothing. Only the three men after seeing the star, followed the star, and got to the star. The wise men's journey took them through hills, deserts, rivers, and months. Not even Herod could stop them from getting to their determined destination. It took perseverance and passion. The level of perseverance and passion determine the level of success. We are invited to be observant, and let determination and action follow what we observe.

How can we participate in the mystery of the Epiphany? This celebration is a prayer that the Spirit of Jesus manifests his presence and power and guides us in our decisions, our plans, our desires, our confusions, our darkness, our sicknesses and afflictions. We pray that the Spirit of Jesus reveals to us many hidden things: hidden truths, hidden aspirations, hidden jobs, hidden helps, hidden healings, hidden life partners, and so on.

The Magi brought gifts to Jesus. What is your gift to Jesus in 2018? One of your best gifts to Jesus is your continued commitment to St. Francis of Assisi parish. Thank you for all your contributions and sacrifices. You have held forth in rain and in the flood, in the heat and in the cold, under the tree and in the tent. I have no doubt that whenever God looks down on the parishioners of St. Francis he sees people of great faith.

Another gift to Jesus is our New Year resolution to add something new in one's spiritual life in 2018. Let it be a step forward, and not backward.

Lastly, we are invited to be wiser this year. Herod asked the Magi to return to him after seeing Jesus, but they listened to God's warning and departed by another way. The Herod of today are our wrong choices, bad decisions, bad associations, our mistakes, our sins and weaknesses that extinguish the light of the Star (Jesus) in us. In 2018, we must not follow Herod's way. Let us wise-up and depart by another way, which is God's way.

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