

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

Today we commemorate the Feast of the Epiphany, when three Gentiles from the East traversed their way to the newborn king. This signifies that the Promise is no longer just for the Jewish people but for all of humanity. It is widely believed that the wise or learned men ventured from Persia. Melchior, Caspar and Balthasar were probably the first Gentiles to have an encounter with Jesus. The implications of this visitation are significant because it offers in an explicit and tangible way the meaning of the Incarnation: salvation is available to all who seek an encounter with Jesus Christ.

*The Navarre Bible: New Testament* expresses it this way: "If Jesus is the one who will establish the new People of God, these wise men, since they are not Jews, stand for those first Gentiles who will receive the call of salvation in Jesus Christ. The Church interprets the episode in this way in her celebration of the solemnity of the Epiphany: "May all the nations come to form part of the family of the patriarchs. And may the children of the promise receive the blessing of the people of Abraham. May all peoples, represented by the Magi, adore the creator of the universe, and may God be known not only in Judea but throughout the whole world..."

That the very first people to pay homage to Jesus were foreigners – literally - portends those who will encounter Him during his public ministry. Those who seek out the Lord include those who are possessed by evil spirits; those who suffer physical maladies; those cast aside because of some shameful past and history. Thus, Jesus does not dwell among us with an air of exclusivity but rather of inclusivity, He desires to include us all in the mystery of divine love which is fundamentally about unconditional love, self-surrender, mercy and forgiveness."

I have often meditated upon the juxtaposition of power and treasure within the divine and human context. Divine power is rooted in a disposition of total love, a gift freely given without terms nor conditions. Divine treasure is predicated upon a stance of poverty and humility. As human beings, we view power in terms of control over other persons and is highly manipulative and self-centered. This is, obviously then, the antithesis of divine power. Human wealth is measured by the acquisition of material things; treasure is valued for its rarity or its worth. Throughout human history, we have failed to learn the fundamental lesson of truth: our power and treasure comes from a relationship with God who fortifies us, nourishes and nurtures us, satisfies our longing and searching hearts and who ultimately, for those who have a relationship with His Son, the gift of eternal life.

How is it that three learned men bearing very valuable gifts find their way to the Manger and upon meeting the baby Jesus, fall on bended knee? Assuredly, there was an element of curiosity once the star was discovered (one of the kings was an astrologer) and, in the ancient world, a bright star was symbolic of a person of power entering into the world. Perhaps they recognized that despite their intellectual knowledge and standing in the community, there was a spiritual dynamic missing from their lives. In their encounter with Jesus, it is they who humble themselves in supplication, in *supplicare* in Latin, before the newborn king. Surely this experience helped them in discerning whether to return to Herod to tell him they had met the Messiah. This was a decisive moment for them; they were moved by the divine, not the temporal. Surely, Herod would have rewarded them handsomely for providing him the valuable information he so desired. Ultimately, there are treasures far more valuable than material wealth.

Saint Pope Leo the Great offered this reflection in a sermon on the Epiphany: "This is the day that David prophesied in the psalms, when he said: All the nations that you have brought into being will come and fall down in adoration in your presence, Lord, and glorify your name. Again, the Lord has made known his salvation; in the sight of the nations he has revealed his justice.

This came to be fulfilled, as we know, from the time when the star beckoned the three wise men out of their distant country and led them to recognize and adore the King of heaven and earth. The obedience of the star calls us to imitate its humble service: to be servants, as best we can, of the grace that invites all men to find Christ.

Dear friends, you must have the same zeal to be of help to one another; then, in the kingdom of God, to which faith and good works are the way, you will shine as children of the light: through our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with God the Father and the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.”

May the divine treasures be yours today and throughout the new year!

Fr. Tom