

Homily – The Epiphany of the Lord 2010

Rise up in splendor, Jerusalem! Your light has come, the glory of the Lord shines upon you.... Nations shall walk by your light, and kings by your shining radiance.... all from Sheba shall come bearing gold and frankincense, and proclaiming the praises of the LORD.

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of the Epiphany. Epiphany means ‘manifestation’, ‘disclosure’; the ‘manifestation’ of Christ to peoples, or gentiles represented by the Magi, the mysterious pilgrims from the East. According to Pope John Paul II, Epiphany celebrates “Christ, the goal of peoples’ pilgrimage in search of salvation”.

In this life, we are on a religious pilgrimage. The Church on earth is called the “Pilgrim People of God”. Our celebration is about the different ways we come to know God. Notice how the categories of people and even those of different religious traditions came to know that the Son of God – the way, the truth and the life – was born. Mary, Joseph and the shepherds knew by Revelation from God through a direct vision of angels. The Magi knew through the scientific study of stars (Astrology). Moreover, King Herod’s scribes came to know through searching the Scriptures what GOD revealed through his prophets of old. Therefore, ‘bible alone’ mentality has been wrong from the very beginning. That is why the Church teaches through Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. Visions, stars (‘natural light of reason’), and the Scriptures are different ways of arriving at the same truth; the Truth that Jesus is.

According to Pope Benedict XVI,

The Epiphany, [is] a vitally important event because it marks the beginning of the conversion of pagan peoples to faith in Christ... If, then, Mary, Joseph and the shepherds of Bethlehem represent the people of Israel who welcomed the Lord, the Magi are the ‘first fruit’ of the Gentiles, also called to become part of the Church, the new people of God, no longer based on ethnic, linguistic or cultural homogeneity, but solely on shared faith in Jesus, the Son of God. For this reason... the Epiphany of Christ is at the same time the epiphany of the Church, in other words the expression of her vocation and universal mission.

That the Magi (pagans) came to acknowledge Jesus Christ tells us that Christ is meant for everyone, not just for some. This is the point Saint Paul makes in the Second Reading: “that the mystery was made known to [him] by revelation ... that the Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel”. The Magi – representing all gentile nations – recognized Jesus as the king of our salvation. Therefore, Christianity is “superior to other religions; all

are called to follow Jesus Christ. Pope John Paul II declares unequivocally, “It is ...incorrect theological perspectives and ... religious relativism which leads to the belief that “one religion is as good as another” (*Redemptoris Missio*, 36). In the words of Pope John Paul II, “*Christ is thus the fulfillment of the yearning of all the world's religions and, as such, he is their sole and definitive completion (Tertio Millennio Adveniente, 6)*. Thus, the Magi, representing the gentiles of all world religions, prostrated themselves and did him [JESUS] homage. Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts of **gold, frankincense, and myrrh**. The gold symbolized his royalty (Jesus is their king, true ruler), the frankincense symbolized his priesthood (Jesus is their priest, who offers the living sacrifice) and myrrh symbolized his burial (Jesus will die to save all from sin).

Man’s search for the meaning of life and for answers to the perplexing questions of life is realized only in Christ – “*The true light that enlightens every man came into the world*” (John 1, 9). Jesus himself says, “*I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life*” (John 8, 12). The Gospel account of the Magi shows that science and religion are not incompatible; science can lead to God. Science doesn’t have to become atheistic. Revelation (faith) knowledge and scientific knowledge can all lead to the true God. Hence the Church teaches that one can know God from Revelation and from also with certainty through Created things.

However, revelation is superior to science. This is what Matthew subtly shows us, namely, that the Star did not lead them all the way; the Magi had to make inquiries from Israelites who in turn searched the Scriptures before they could direct them to Bethlehem. Knowledge of the inmost being of God can only come through revelation. Hence, truth is ultimately a matter of supernatural revelation, supernatural light. Jesus is that supernatural light. **THIS STAR IS NOT MERELY A NATURAL OBJECT. JESUS IS THAT STAR;** consequently, all Bible translations are unanimous on what Matthew wrote; we saw “his star”, not a star. Jesus is the true light leading all to the truth. The Book of Numbers referred to him in this way: “I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not nigh: a star shall come forth out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel” (Num 24:17). The book of Revelation describes him as “*the bright morning star*” (Rev 22:16). The fact that God uses signs underlines the place of the sacraments of the church.

As Christians, therefore, we must understand how privileged we are. The Catholic Church has the fullness of truth. To whom much is given, much is expected. The Israelites were more privileged than the Magi but did not utilize the revelation knowledge they had; whereas the Magi had only science – the natural light of reason; and they were able to recognize Christ. May God lead all to the truth through Christ our Lord, Amen.