

## EPIPHANY – 2022

Again I want to wish you all a blessed Christmas which we celebrate for a season and not just for a day. And this feast of the Epiphany is a very important moment in this Christmas season. The word ‘epiphany’ comes from a Greek word meaning ‘manifestation’ or ‘showing’; in this case, Jesus is manifested or shown to be the Savior not for the chosen people only, but for the whole human race as represented by those magi.

I also want to wish you all a very happy new year as we begin 2022 today/yesterday. It doesn’t happen often that New Year’s Day and the feast of the Epiphany are back-to-back like they are this year. And there actually is a connection we can make between these two observances. This feast of the Epiphany reminds us of the magi who traveled with a firm purpose and goal in mind: led by a star, they wanted to see him who they had come to know as the ‘newborn King of the Jews’. The magi were not Jews themselves; that’s why their coming to adore the newborn Christ is so important—he truly is the Savior of all.

The magi traveled through place (somewhere ‘from the east’) and time (we don’t know how long it took them to arrive) because they wanted to see and be with the infant Jesus. And their journey reflects the journey every one of us is on. Maybe we haven’t traveled far from east or west, north or south; maybe some of us have never really traveled all that far away from home. But we all travel through this life toward the same goal and with the same purpose: to be with Jesus.

Are we conscious and mindful of that fact, that we are all on that journey? And that our ultimate goal is not to be found in this earthly existence of ours? I certainly don’t minimize the responsibilities we have in this life as parent, child, employer or employee, teacher, student, priest. Farmers have their daily chores, students have their regular homework and other school projects, we all have things demanding our daily attention and thus need to be faithful to our responsibilities.

But in the midst of all that, let’s not forget our ultimate goal and purpose: to be with Jesus, just as the magi wanted to be with Jesus. The closeness of this Epiphany and this New Year gives us a great opportunity to see how well we are aware of and pursuing that goal. The new year is often a time for resolutions; e.g. spending more time in prayer, doing a better job of controlling my temper, connecting more with ailing or homebound family or friends. Such resolutions and others like them are worthy goals to strive for, and they can also help us be more aware of that life-path we travel on, day by day, until we come to the goal of eternal joy and life with Christ. The more we make the gift of ourselves to others out of genuine love and care for others, the more we are reminded of our path and goal.

Pope Francis has made these points; in a New Year’s Eve homily eight years ago he reminded us that God has entered into our world and history with the birth of Jesus, and that ‘the response we give today to God... bears upon our future.’ He also said that our Christian vision of time and history is not circular (the same things happening over and over) but is instead linear—it’s a journey that has a direction and a goal, it ‘moves toward completion’. The completion of another

year, he said, ‘is a further step toward the destination that awaits us...for we shall encounter God, who is the reason for our hope and the source of our happiness.’

God has indeed acted in history, especially in the birth of his Son into our world and his manifestation, his ‘epiphany’ as Savior of all humanity. And that divine action in history is not limited to 2000 years ago in Bethlehem, or on Calvary, or in that empty tomb. God continues to work in our own lives and history—sometimes quietly and unobtrusively, and other times more openly and even dramatically. I just learned within the last week of an example of the latter. A friend of mine from a prior assignment has told me often about his father who for the last 30 years had totally abandoned the practice of his Catholic faith for various reasons. He was very bitter about the Church and ridiculed his family members for continuing to believe and to practice their faith. I encouraged him over and over again to keep praying for his father, but he said he knew it would do no good whatsoever.

Perhaps you can guess where this is going?? Anyway, on Christmas morning last week my friend’s dad called him and asked if he would take him to church. Long story short: his dad indeed went to Christmas Mass, blessed himself with holy water, tried to genuflect (he has bad knees), and even received Holy Communion. Later that day my friend’s mother told him that his dad had earlier contacted the local pastor for confession. His email continues: “I nearly fell over. She [his mother] said he did it all on his own. No prying, no convincing, no nothing. I asked her why all of a sudden did he want to return the church; especially when he would mock it over and over and over again. Mom said she didn’t have any idea...I’m still in disbelief. I’m not sure how this will all pan out, but I’ll leave this in God’s hands. Still in shock”.

Prayer works. God works. God works not just in some nebulous, vague or unseen ways, but also in the concrete, historical real-life circumstances of life...and sometimes in really amazing and startling ways, as my friend has now experienced in a very much up-close-and-personal way. And not only does God work in history, but he wants us to do the same thing, and particularly in this new year. Back to Pope Francis who asks: “how have we lived the time which [God] has given us? Have we used it primarily for ourselves...or have we also sought to spend it on others? How much time have we reserved for being with God in prayer, in silence, in adoration?” There is a good focus for some truly meaningful New Year’s resolutions—to be more mindful of God’s presence in ourselves and others and in the world on this leg of the journey that is this new year of 2022.

The magi knew the goal of their journey—to see Jesus, the newborn King. May we be always mindful of our end goal—to see and be with Jesus in this life through love of God and neighbor as self, and then in his eternal kingdom. Let’s stay on that path; let’s remember that goal. Let’s grow in our desire for Jesus and our resolve to love and follow him every day in this life and into the eternity that he came to this earth to bring us.