

Solemnity of the Epiphany  
January 8, 2017

*Herod, whom do you fear?*

Readings: Isaiah 60: 1-6; Ephesians 3:2-3,5-6; Matthew 2:1-12

Today, we are privileged to celebrate a Feast in the Church that by its very nature is universal. It is certainly a captivating account, perhaps one of our earliest memories as a child centered on these Christmas accounts. Still, we are urged to look more deeply today to truly marvel at the message of the Magi. The contrasts between the Magi and King Herod are quite remarkable, as is the realization about how he, a powerful man, feared a mere baby. The Gospel tells us that Herod met with the Magi secretly. Why did he do this, for after all, he was an important man, one who could invite into his presence those whom he desired?

An early Church Father wrote:

You destroy those who are tiny in body because fear is destroying your heart. You imagine that if you accomplish your desire, you can prolong your own life, though you are seeking to kill Life himself. Yet your throne is threatened by the source of grace, so small, yet so great, who is lying in the manger.

St. Quodvultdeus (*Sermo 2 de Symbolo: PL 40, 655*)

Herod was a pathetic and fear-filled man. He grabbed hold of power and was desperately afraid that his power would slip from his grasp. Fear paralyzes, fear is often irrational and when it captures us, we respond in ways that go against our better judgment. Responding in fear reveals our weakest natures. A powerful man suddenly looks weak and insignificant.

When we then look to the three mysterious men from the East traveling by means of a star, we see a very different response, one based in wonder and awe, not fear. When they come upon the Savior of the world they worship in humility, bearing gifts.

In this ancient feast dating to the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, our attention today is drawn to the divine dignity of the Christ Child, who is the Messianic king of the world. The universality of God's salvation in the New Jerusalem, which is the Church, finds expression in our second reading, proclaiming that "the Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel."

For us today, this means that we truly seek to spread the Gospel to all people and to serve them. Serving and welcoming people fleeing violence and conflict in various regions of the world is part of our identity as Catholics. Today, with more than 20 million refugees, the need to welcome them and provide freedom from persecution is especially acute.<sup>1</sup>

As Catholics, we support work to ensure that refugees are humanely welcomed without sacrificing our security or our core values as Americans. These two values need to be addressed together. A duty to welcome and protect newcomers, particularly refugees, is an integral part of our mission to help our neighbors in need.

In doing this, we are able to see the spiritual significance of the event known as Epiphany. God has been made manifest in the person of the Word made flesh, and it has now fallen to us to continue to make his name known and loved in the world to all people.

Can we see in Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar a reflection of humanity even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? In the midst of all that we may not know, in the midst of all the uncertainty in our world, could these kings serve to teach us anything about faith, hope and charity?

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<sup>1</sup> USCCB Post-Election Statement of 15 November 2016. Statistics from the UNHCR. Measured against the world's population of 7.4 billion people, one in every 113 people globally is now either an asylum-seeker, internally displaced or a refugee.

In our families, it is my hope that this year's Christmas cycle has been an occasion for you to love your family more deeply, to express your unity more clearly and to model the gift of peace that has come into our midst with the birth of our Savior.

Christmas is above all a feast of our redemption, and so is Epiphany. Jesus came to redeem all humanity, and the sign of wise men from the East left no shadow of a doubt that he came to lead all to salvation. He is manifest in our midst for all to see; this royal action of Christ reaches out to all his people, joyfully subject to his Reign of Peace.

There are many gifts that present in this parish, gifts of faith, family, wise counsel and generosity. Like the Magi, we are invited to lay down these gifts before the Prince of Peace, begging of Him guidance for our lives. These lives, lived in peace, enable us to be a light to the nations, a light to our classmates at school, our colleagues at work, and to each other.

We gain strength when we come together in spirit and truth to worship God. He has given to us the greatest gift in the person of His Son, now poured forth by means of his sacrificial death, and made present in His Body and Blood given to us. Let us embrace both the gift and task of peace, and in so doing, we will do our part to honor the Newborn King.