

“Go and search diligently for the child.” With these words King Herod sent the Magi in pursuit of the Savior of the World. Little could Herod have known just how prescient his words were. The directive he gave to the astronomers from the East became the impetus for their conversion. He sent them to Bethlehem due to his own insecurity, fear and jealousy.

Herod blatantly lied to the Magi as he dispatched them on their way. This man, who executed one of his wives and two of his sons thought nothing of lying to the Magi. He was deluded, violent and vicious. Having had messianic ambitions of his own, this ruler likely died shortly after these events, just as the Savior of the World came into the world.

“Why does the impious Herod fear, when told that Christ the King is near!” So wrote the 5th c. Roman poet Sedulius.¹ Why are you afraid, Herod? What or whom do you fear? This question is equally valid today. Unquestionably, secularists are growing both in number and influence in our nation. Considering the Covid- related restrictions imposed upon the Church in some parts of our nation, legitimate questions are being asked about equal treatment for places of worship vis-à-vis big box stores.

While we ought to presume the best of intentions of others, nevertheless constitutional issues are vitally important. The right to assemble for worship is foundational, as is our duty to contribute to the common good. At times, these rights and duties collide and it’s worth considering whether at least some of these attitudes are borne out of a disdain for what we hold dearest– our faith in Jesus Christ. Some may even fear the Church’s influence on societal convictions, as Catholic convictions get in the way of their agenda. We cannot be naïve and dismiss this.

¹ Caelius Sedulius (ca. +430 A.D.), included as a hymn for Vespers on the Feast of the Epiphany. *Hostis Herodes impie, Christum venire quid times?*

When Jesus Christ is manifest, we change. Society begins to shift, and some are threatened by a world in which personal religious belief influences action, and so they seek to discredit these movements.

Epiphany is the feast of the manifestation of Jesus to the nations and is a clarion call to us believers to make him known today. In a homily for this solemnity of Epiphany, St. Augustine describes the star as “the mouth of the heavens” and the Magi as the “first fruits of the Gentiles,” a phrase almost identical to the Prayer over the Offerings² at the Vigil Mass for Epiphany.³ He even acknowledges the role of the infant Jesus:

He was at that time lying in a manger, and yet was leading the Magi from the East. He lay hidden in the stable, yet He was acknowledged in the heavens, so that He, acknowledged in the heavens, might be made manifest in the stable...⁴

He also invites present day kings, one might say the equivalent of our leaders, to themselves recognize Jesus. “Let our kings today stand in pious fear of Him who is now sitting at the right hand of His Father...” As believers, we must be prepared to accept the fact that others do not acknowledge him whom we see lying in the manger. Far too many judge our beliefs to be little else than fairy tales. While this is hardly new, this fact cannot keep us from manifesting to the world our convictions.

“Whom do you fear Herod?” Could we not ask, “Whom do you fear America?” Our convictions as Catholic ought to make our society more loving, just and responsive to those most in need. Let us pray for our elected leaders, so that they recognize the pivotal role that faith plays in a well-functioning society, so that they can see us as allies for the common good, rather than as stumbling blocks to a secularized vision of society.

² Missale Romanum (2002), “múnera nostra pro apparitióne Unigéniti Filii tui et **primitiis géntium** dicáta”

³ S. Augustinus Hipponensis, *Sermo II in Epiphania Domini I,1* “Illi erant **primitiae Gentium...**”

⁴ Ibid. “In praesepe tunc iacebat, et Magos ab Oriente ducebat. Abscondebatur in stabulo, et agnoscebatur in coelo; ut agnitus in coelo manifestaretur in stabulo...”

This Cathedral is a faith-filled parish. By your witness to your faith and commitment to the foundation of your family, each day you manifest the Truth of Jesus Christ. We must not retreat into the silence of our homes, for that would be antithetical to everything that this solemnity celebrates, represents and invites us to do.

The Wise Men recognized heaven in a baby's gaze. They diligently sought a child and found their Savior. Following their example, let us ask for God's blessing upon our homes and our families; let us seek the Lord diligently and be renewed to publicly witness to the manifestation of our Savior.