

Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord B/2012

All the readings of this feast of Epiphany invite us to the celebration of the manifestation of Jesus to the world. They also invite us to see in the Epiphany of Jesus a sign of the universality of God and a confirmation that our God is a God of all the nations.

The first reading recalls the prophecy of Isaiah to the people of Israel in the aftermath of the exile from Babylon. In fact, the prophet sees Jerusalem rising in splendor and the glory of the Lord shining above the city. While all other nations will be in darkness, Jerusalem enlightened by the Lord will become attractive and those nations will walk by its light.

Because of that attraction, they will bring to Jerusalem their wealth and their riches charged in caravans and dromedaries. Even the kings from the East will bring to Jerusalem gold and frankincense, and proclaim the praises of the Lord.

What is behind this prophecy is the idea that God is a God of all the nations and of all the peoples. Even the people who are not of the race of Israel belong to him. Therefore, he is not exclusive of some people or nations, but rather open to anyone of those who invoke him and search for him.

That is the reason why, in the second reading, St Paul is almost jubilant at the idea of being made apostle of the gentiles. This is a grace that God has given him as he has revealed now the mystery of his plan he held hidden for many generations. According to that revelation, the gentiles are made coheirs with the Jews; they have become members of Christ's body and copartners in the promise brought through the Gospel.

This text helps us understand the Gospel and why the pagan wise men had to travel from faraway to Jerusalem in search for Jesus. In fact, the Gospel says that when Jesus was born, the magi coming from the East arrived in Jerusalem at the search for Jesus. Those people were skilled in philosophy, medicine and the natural sciences of their time.

As they knew how to interpret the future by observing the stars, they saw one that told them something about an infant king. They set out to find him and their journey led them to Jerusalem. But, when the star they were following disappeared, they inquired from the inhabitants of Jerusalem about that infant king.

Informed about the news, Herod became perplexed and afraid about his throne. The information he collected from the learned of his entourage and the country left him again more perplexed than ever. After all, he enjoined the magi to provide him with more information in case they found the infant king.

When eventually, the magi saw again the star and found the infant Jesus with his mother, they did him homage and offered him their gifts. The gold symbolized the recognition of the kingship of Jesus, the frankincense symbolized his priestly function and the myrrh refers to the embalment of his body. All three gifts mean that Jesus was born in order to reign, to be a priest and to die for the sins of the world. After receiving a warning not to go back to Herod, the magi returned to their country by another way.

What do we learn from this Gospel? The first thing we learn is about the universality of God. The fact that the pagan wise men came in search for Jesus teaches us that our

God is for all the nations of the earth and all the people. That is why Epiphany teaches us that God is not the redeemer of Israel alone, but rather the savior of the whole world, including the pagans represented by the magi. In that sense, each one of us is important for God and each one of us can look for God and find him.

The second thing we learn is about the character of exemplarity of Israel. In fact, Israel was not chosen for its own sake, but rather in order to serve as a light to other nations so that other people may see how God deals with Israel and come to believe in him.

This character of exemplarity sheds light on our own vocation. We are never called for ourselves, but always beyond our own call, for the good of others. We just serve as God's instruments for the salvation of others. In that sense, the personal vocation transcends the limits of the individual and points to the multitude because, beyond our personal vocation, God wants to reach out to many through us.

The third thing we learn is about the importance of recognizing the signs of God's presence. In fact, God speaks to us in many ways, but we have to recognize the signs of his presence. These signs are different from one person to another, and according to circumstances of life. Only those who are attentive to God's signs, like the magi, can find him.

The fourth thing we learn is about the importance of the dispositions of heart. In fact, some people can be so self-centered that they pretend to know everything about God. Like Herod and his priest and scribes, however, they have no desire of establishing a relationship with him. The consequence is that, in spite of their knowledge, they cannot discover God. Other people are like the magi. They really desire to know God and meet him. Even when things become difficult, they do not give up; instead they ask for help and persevere until the star appears again.

The last thing I want to say is about the symbolism of the star. The star is the symbol of faith. In fact, faith is a long journey made up of conviction and doubt, success and failure. As such, faith has its moments of darkness and brightness. What matters most is the perseverance we ought to have when it is dark.

That is what the magi have done. When the star disappeared, they asked for help. We need to do the same thing. In time of light, we have to be thankful to God and in time of darkness, we need the courage of asking for help in order to find our way again.

Let us pray that the Lord may help us understand that we are his instruments he can use in order to reach out to others. Let us ask him to give us the courage to persevere in our faith in spite of the many difficulties we find on our way. May God bless you and help you find the way to him!

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



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