

Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord C/2013

The readings of this feast of the Epiphany of our Lord talk about the universality of God. They show that God is the savior of all the nations of the earth, represented by the magi, and not only of the people of Israel. They invite us to pay him our homage and to adore him.

The first reading of Isaiah expresses the universality of God from the background of Israel's return from exile. At that time, Jerusalem will be enlightened and the glory of God will shine upon the city. While the nations will be covered with darkness, Jerusalem will shine as God's glory appears. Because of that glory, the nations will walk by the light of Jerusalem and kings by its shining radiance.

At the same time, the sons and daughters of Israel will come from afar and take delight in the joy of Jerusalem. The riches of the sea and the wealth of the nations will be brought to Jerusalem. And the kings of the Eastern part of the world, namely from Midian, Ephah and Sheba, will bring gold and frankincense, and proclaim the praises of God.

What is behind this text is the idea that God is not exclusive of some people, but rather open to anyone who invokes his name. In that sense, all the nations of the earth belong to God and one day they will all glory in the splendor of his name.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel, as it describes the trip of the magi to Bethlehem to see the infant Jesus. First of all, the Gospel says that when Jesus was born, magi from the East came to Jerusalem looking for the new born king of the Jews. They reported having seen his star and followed it in order to pay him homage.

When King Herod and the inhabitants of Jerusalem heard about the news, they were all troubled. Then, King Herod assembled all the chief priests and the scribes in order to inquire about the place where such a king of the Jews would be born. When he was told that it was in Bethlehem of Judea, he reported the news to the magi, but not without first giving them the recommendation to come back and inform him so that he might go, too, to pay him homage.

After the audience with Herod, the magi again saw the star. They followed it until it came and stopped over the place where Jesus was. On entering they saw the infant Jesus with his mother, Mary. They prostrated and did him homage. Then, they offered him gold, frankincense and myrrh. As they were about to return to their country, they were warned in a dream not to go back by the same route, because Herod was planning to kill the baby, Jesus.

What do we learn from today's Gospel? The first thing I want to highlight is the importance of discovering the signs of the presence of God in our life. In fact, one of the striking things in today's Gospel is the fact that, by observing the stars of the sky, the magi came to discover one that had a special message to the point that they set out to go to Bethlehem in order to find the newborn king of the Jews.

And yet, many in their land had seen the same stars, but they did not come to discover any difference between them. For them, everything was as ordinary as it was since the

foundation of the world. But, for the Magi, something new had happened that was worth a trip. How do we explain such a difference of attitude?

In fact, the main reason why the magi came to decipher the message in the star is that they were open to the reality of God. They were in search of his presence. If we are not attentive to the signs of the presence of God in our life, we can easily pass beside an event in which God talks to us. It is like escaping death at the occasion of an accident on the highway. A non-believer would easily say that he was lucky enough to get out of it without damage. But a man of faith would say that the hand of God was with him and he spared his life.

To learn to recognize the signs of the presence of God in our life is the challenge we face today, because it is vital to the growth of our faith. If we really pay attention to the signs of the presence of God in our life, we will realize that it is not at random that we exist, but for a purpose that God had in his plan for us since the foundation of the world. Only this way can help us understand that God speaks to us through the events happening in our life. In that sense, there is no chance, but everything is God's providence, grace and magnanimity.

The second point I want to highlight is the symbolism of the star. The appearance and disappearance of the star symbolizes the trajectory of faith. In fact, faith is a long journey made up of success and failure, light and darkness, conviction and doubt, etc.

As such, faith has its moments of darkness and brightness, ups and downs. If that is the case, what matters most is not that at times, it might be difficult to believe because of some problems we have, but the courage to persevere in time of clouds and darkness. When such moments happen in our life, we need the courage to be humble and ask for help.

That is what the magi had done. As long as the star was bright and leading them, they kept going. Once the star disappeared and the whole project seemed to be doomed to failure, they asked for help. If we really need to be God's people and grow in faith, there is no other way we have to go through than that of the magi. In time of light and blessing, we need to be thankful to God. In time of darkness and distress in our life, we need to have the courage to ask for assistance so that we find our way again. If we do not act that way, we will lose everything. Let us, then, ask of the Lord the grace of perseverance when things become tough in our life. Let us ask of him the grace of his Spirit so that we come to discern the signs of his presence in our life and in the world. May God bless you all!

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



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