

The Epiphany of the Lord A/2014

All the readings of this celebration of the Epiphany talk about the manifestation of Jesus to the world. They insist on the universality of God by showing that God belongs to all the nations and peoples of the earth. He is not a private property of some people and race, or an exclusivity of some nations. On the contrary, he is the savior of the world as a whole.

The first reading describes the universality of God from the background of Israel's history of liberation from exile. It shows that Jerusalem will become a light to the nations and a shining power to the kings of the earth. It shows equally that the wealth of the nations and the various riches of the people will be brought to Jerusalem in order to praise God. Finally, the text highlights the fact that, while foreigners and Jews alike will come to Jerusalem, the glory of God will shine upon the city.

What is behind this text is the idea that God is not exclusive of some people, but open to anyone who invokes his name. Another idea is the truth that the election of Israel was for the sake of the whole world. In that sense, the election aimed at serving of an example to the nations of the earth, like a light shining in darkness, so that they come to know how God is caring, loving, generous and merciful.

This text allows us to understand the stakes of today's Gospel that talks about the trip of magi to Jerusalem in search for Jesus. First of all, the Gospel states that the magi, who were following a star at the birth of Jesus, came to Jerusalem seeking for him in order to do him homage.

It says that by hearing the news, Herod was very troubled to the point that he convoked high priests and scribes in order to inquiry about the affair. The Gospel says also that once Herod was informed about the place according to the prophecies, he let the magi know by recommending them to come back to him so that he may go in turn to adore the child.

After that the Gospel says that, once the magi left the king Herod, the star reappeared again to them; they followed it and came to the place where the baby Jesus was. Finally, the Gospel affirms that the magi were happy as they found Jesus and offered him their gifts. In returning home, they took another way after being warned in a dream.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Today I want to talk about the universality of God. In fact, in the creed we recite every Sunday, we say that "I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church". From the outset, let me say that the adjective "catholic" means universal, that is, of all the people, of all the nations, etc.

If that is true, then, it means that in his essence, God is not exclusive, but open to all the people and all the nations of the earth. In that sense, God is not limited by the language people speak or the color of their skin so that we may say that he is black, white, green, yellow, red or purple. He is just God.

For that reason, God comes to the encounter of anyone who seeks him in truth; he wants to establish a relationship with anyone of every nation or people who is open to him. However, in order for that to happen, we have to recognize the signs of his presence.

Those signs are different from one person to another, and according to circumstances of life. Only those who are attentive to the signs of his presence, like the magi, can encounter him. The best example I can give here is that of a car accident from which people have survived the crash. An atheist will simply say that he was lucky enough to escape death. A believer will say that God was merciful with him to the point of protecting him from death.

This example gives us a clue about the interpretation of the sign of God's presence. In fact, people can be so self-sufficient and prideful that they pretend to know everything about God from the books, like Herod, the priests and the scribes, but without any desire of establishing a relationship with him. Of course, they might know a lot about God, but such knowledge is just intellectual and does not engage the heart they should give to God. That is why, in spite of their knowledge, such people can never discover God and know him in truth.

Some others, on the contrary, who desire deeply in their hearts to know God, he will establish a relationship with them. To such people, God will never hide his face. Whatever might be the length of their search and all the obstacles in their way, he will open up to them. That is exactly what happened to the magi. Their perseverance had paid, because though the star they were following disappeared, they did not abandon their search. In the end, they found the star again and eventually found Jesus.

That is why we have to understand that whatever might be the hardships we can have in our faith or the doubts which rise because of the difficulties of life, if we do not drop our arms, God will console us. In that sense, faith in God has its moments of darkness and brightness. What matters most is the perseverance we need to have when it is dark. That is what the magi have done. When the star disappeared, they asked for help. We need to react like them: in time of light and peace to be thankful to God and in time of darkness and doubt to have the courage of asking for help in order to find our way again. In the uncertainty of life, may God help you to find the way to him! May God bless you all!

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



Homily Date: January 5, 2014

© 2014 – Fr Felicien I. Mbala, PhD, STD

Contact: www.mbala.org

Document Name: 20140105homily.pdf