

Epiphany of the Lord B/2015

The readings of this feast of Epiphany talk about the manifestation of Jesus to the world. They invite us to see in the revelation of Jesus to the magi a sign of the universality of God and a confirmation that God is inclusive of all the nations of the earth.

The first reading recalls the prophecy of Isaiah about the future of Jerusalem. It highlights the fact that Jerusalem will become attractive to the nations of the earth like a rising star that shines above the city. It highlights in particular the return to the city of all the dispersed sons of Israel and the pilgrimage of the kings of the East who will bring to Jerusalem their gifts to offer to God.

What is behind this text is the idea that God is inclusive of all the people of the earth and not exclusive. Another idea is that all the people of the earth belong to God. The last idea is relative to the truth that God is open to anyone who looks for him with sincerity.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as it relates the visit of the magi to Jerusalem in search for the infant King, Jesus. In fact, the Gospel starts with the mention of the visit that has troubled the whole city and its king. It gives the reaction of the King Herod and his assembly at the news that there was another King in the country. Then, it reports on the instruction King Herod gave to the magi once he was informed about the birth place of Jesus.

After that, the Gospel reports on the re-appearance of the star, the steadfast trip of the magi to the place where Mary and the baby were and the type of offering they gave him. The Gospel ends up with the return of the magi to their homeland by taking a different road than they previously had taken.

What do we learn from this feast? Today I want to talk about the universality of God. Let me start with the pilgrimage I recently did in Israel. In fact, one of the facts that struck me the most in the pilgrimage was the number of the pilgrims who came to Israel, from different countries of the world, in order to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. Those pilgrims came from different churches and denominations that believe in Jesus.

By seeing them, I just felt in me that the prophecy of Isaiah we heard today in the first reading was true. All the nations walk by the light of the God of Israel; they all gather and come to Israel. In fact, for me, the presence of all those pilgrims was a proof that the God of Israel, whose full revelation has been manifested in Jesus Christ, was also the God of all the nations of the earth and not only of Israel alone.

Moreover, when I saw the Church of the nations, which is close to the Mountain of Olives, at the place where Our Lord taught his disciples how to pray, with the prayer of "Our Father" written in all the languages of the world, I was all the more confirmed in the idea that God belongs to all the nations.

That feeling was already felt since the time of the birth of Jesus by the magi. They undertook a long trip to Jerusalem in order to find Jesus and offer him their gifts, showing thereby that through him God has opened his doors to all the nations of the earth so that whoever looks for him may find him and come to eternal salvation.

If that is true, then, this feast has immense consequences for us, collectively and individually. At the collective level, it means that no nation is rejected by God. On the

contrary, all the nations of the earth are loved by him in the same way, without distinction or discrimination. In the same way, all the nations of the earth have the same right and same privilege before him; they are all called to salvation.

At the individual level, each person, whoever he is, wherever he is, is important before God and loved by him. Whatever might be his background, his past or his present situation, his size or the color of his skin, he enjoys the same privilege of being the child of God. The society might treat him otherwise, but never God. For God, he is his child and, therefore, he is important.

Such a vision sheds light on the call of Israel as a nation. In fact, Israel was not chosen for its own sake, but rather in order to serve as light to other nations so that other people may see how God deals with Israel and come to believe in him. That is why, as a nation, Israel has a character of exemplarity in the sense that God chose them in order to give an example to other people so that they come to understand that God is good, benevolent, merciful, forgiving, loving, liberator, etc.

This character of exemplarity of Israel sheds light on our own vocation. In fact, we are never called for our own sake, but always beyond our own call, for the good of others. We just serve as God's instruments for the salvation of our brothers and sisters. When we have gifts and talents, God knows why he has given them to us and not to someone else, namely that we become the channel he uses in order to touch the lives of many. 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.

Another consequence is that because God is open to all the nations and all the people, he comes to our encounter and wants to get in touch with us. But, we have to recognize the signs of his presence. Those signs are different from one person to another, and according to the circumstances of life. Only those who are attentive to God's signs, like the magi, can find him.

In order to recognize the signs of the presence of God, the disposition of heart is very important. In fact, some people can be so self-centered that they pretend to know everything about God. Like Herod, his priests and his scribes, however, they have no desire of establishing a relationship with him. Consequently, in spite of their knowledge, they cannot discover God. Other people are like the magi: they burn with the 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.

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 of him the courage of perseverance so that, like the magi, we end up finding him in spite of difficulties and doubts on our journey. May God bless you all!

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



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