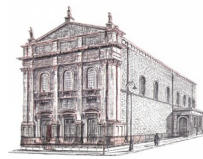




PARISH OF ST. AGATHA

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POPE FRANCIS: BE LIKE THE MAGI AND JOURNEY TO GOD

Pope Francis calls faithful to be like the Magi, who, he said, continued to look upward at the sky, took risks and set out bearing gifts for Christ. "If we want to find Jesus, we have to overcome our fear of taking risks, our self-satisfaction and our indolent refusal to ask anything more of life," Francis said. "We need to take risks simply to meet a Child." "Those risks are immensely worth the effort," the pope said, "since in finding that Child, in discovering his tenderness and love, we rediscover ourselves."

KEEP EYES RAISED TO HEAVEN

The Three Wise Men, also traditionally called the Magi, were the only ones who saw the star leading the way to the manger, the Pope said, because they were among the few people who raised their eyes to the heavens. "We often make do with looking at the ground: it's enough to have our health, a little money and a bit of entertainment," Pope Francis added. "I wonder if we still know how to look up at the sky. Do we know how to dream, to long for God, to expect the newness he brings, or do we let ourselves be swept along by life, like dry branches before the wind?"

The Magi, he continued, were not satisfied with "just getting by, with keeping afloat" and continued instead to look up and follow the path. Many others who instead raised their eyes toward the heavens but chose not to follow the star to Bethlehem.

LET THE DIVINE STAR LEAD YOU TO PEACE

"Jesus' star does not dazzle or overwhelm, but gently invites," he said, calling faithful to beware of the "meteors" and "shooting stars" that promise success, wealth and fortune only to quickly fade away and "mislead rather than lead." The Lord's star, he said, while not shining as bright as others, is a reliable and constant light that "takes you by the hand in life and accompanies you" to peace and joy as it did with the Magi. Another quality the Pope encouraged Massgoers to borrow from the Three Wise Men is to "set out" in order to find Jesus. In order to do this, faithful must also free themselves from unnecessary burdens and push through life's obstacles. "Jesus allows himself to be found by those who seek him, but to find him we need to get up and go, not sit around but take risks, not stand still, but set out," Francis said.

SPIRITUAL JOURNEY IS NECESSARY

"Jesus makes demands: he tells those who seek him to leave behind the armchair of worldly comforts and the reassuring warmth of hearth and home. Following Jesus is not a polite etiquette to be observed, but a journey to be undertaken." The Pope admitted that setting out is not easy. Herod stayed locked in his palace, sending others to gather information in his stead, and all of Jerusalem was afraid of the changes that would be brought in by the Son of God. Worse still, the Pope continued, were the scribes and priests, who knew about the ancient prophecy and told Herod, but did not set out to go to Bethlehem.

WALK THE TALK

"Theirs can be the temptation of those who are used to being believers: they can talk at length about the faith they know so well, but will not take a personal risk for the Lord. They talk, but do not pray; they complain, but do no good," Francis said. On the other hand, the Magi "talk little and journey much," and once they arrive at the manger they gave gifts, imitating Jesus who came to the world to offer His life. "To give freely, for the Lord's sake, without expecting anything in return: this is the sure sign that we have found Jesus," the Pope said. "To do good without counting the cost, even when unasked, even when you gain nothing thereby, even if it is unpleasant. That is what God wants." Just as Jesus gave everything for the poor, hungry and needy, so are Catholics encouraged to be close and help the sick and downtrodden. These are gifts freely given, and they cannot be lacking in the lives of Christians. I invite the faithful to think of a free gift to give without expecting anything in return and to ask the Lord to help us to rediscover the joy of giving. (Vatican News 2018).

THE EPIPHANY OF THE INVISIBLE GOD MADE VISIBLE IN JESUS

The Magi represent all the nations in the World called to follow Jesus. The Star is Divine Wisdom that reflects the Eternal Light of Christ (Wisdom 7:26), shining as a Guide for everyone to follow. This Star is a Light to enlighten unbelievers. The reassuring Star also shines for the struggling soul, who has found Jesus, but finds their pilgrimage journey of life difficult to walk. Jesus is saying not to lose Hope, because He is always shining on us. The Magi are called Wisemen (Mt 2:1-12), because they accepted the sacred opportunity to find and Believe in Him. In their wisdom, they persevered and endured the task of setting out on a difficult long journey to fulfil their Vocation, which will be rewarded with the Eternal Star Light of Heaven someday.

EPIPHANY MEANS TO REVEAL

The Greek word 'Epiphany' means, 'to manifest' or 'to show' or 'to reveal' the great Mystery of the Holy Trinity. Today in celebrating the Epiphany, the invisible God in Heaven, reveals Himself, as the visible Person of Jesus Christ to the Magi who represent the World. This miracle of Creation is brought about by the divine activity of the Holy Spirit, who overshadowed the Virgin Mary.

GOLD FIT FOR A KING

The three Wisemen offered Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh. These gifts were symbolic of the importance of Jesus' supernatural Birth, Life, Death and Resurrection. The Gold representing his Royal standing as Eternal King. Frank-incense marks His Eternal Priesthood, as incense is used as a sign of reverence today, in acknowledging the Risen Eucharistic Body of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. The Church at Funeral and Ordination Masses of Priests, incense the human body, in the ritual act of acknowledging their purpose on earth, to pay homage and be holy temples of God. The Myrrh represents Jesus' Human Nature and Death, because it is used for embalming and sometimes anointing the dead. It leaves behind an aroma, which can be interpreted as the spiritual aroma of Faith, left behind by God, attracting us to follow the Risen Christ.

CHRISTMAS GOODWILL BEGINS TODAY

Now that the Crib, the Christmas tree and the season street lights come down, the work of Christmas really begins! It is our vocational mission and Christian duty to evangelise our faith through continuous charitable actions and deeds. To imitate Christ and also be a light to those in darkness, to go out and find the lost, to heal the broken, to feed the hungry, to release the prisoner, to practice patience and understanding, to rebuild broken relationships, to humbly admit our faults and bring Peace and new Life to hearts crippled by anger and hatred.

NEW YEAR RESOLUTION

Lord Jesus Christ, we pray a New Year 2021 resolution, by asking You to give us the Gold of Your Holy Love, that we may reflect that Love upon those we find challenging to love and forgive. As Frankincense represents reverence, please give us the spirit of a daily Holy Prayer life, to honour and pay homage to You, through devotion of Mary (daily Rosary). As Myrrh highlights the awareness of the mortality of the body and the immortality of the soul, please give us the desire and Grace to discipline and mortify ourselves in all that displeases You. Grant us the Grace to be more faithful to You in this new year and to amend our sinful ways. We resolve to obey and love You for the sake of the Light of the Eternal Kingdom. After the Wisemen encountered Jesus, they were changed and inspired to return Home a different Path, to avoid Herod, who symbolises Sin. We too, after finding Jesus on our journey of faith, should feel the same desire to change our sinful life and set out on a new way, which is Christ's Way, to always follow the Star (Christ) and get Home to Heaven, by avoiding sin. God bless, Fr. Brendan.