

"The Three Kings Had Their Star. We Have Mary."

In 1956, St. Josemaria gave a homily entitled "The Epiphany of our Lord." We offer a selection here.

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"When they saw the star again they rejoiced with exceeding great joy" (Mt 2:10). Why were they so happy? Because those who never doubted receive proof from the Lord that the star had not disappeared.

They had ceased to contemplate it visibly, but they had kept it always in their soul. Such is the Christian's vocation. If we do not lose faith, if we keep our hope in Jesus Christ who will be with us "until the consummation of the world" (Mt 28:20), then the star reappears. And with this fresh proof that our vocation is real, we are conscious of a greater joy which increases our faith, hope and love.

"Going into the house they saw the child with Mary, his Mother, and they fell down and worshipped him" (Mt 2:11). We also kneel down before Jesus, God hidden in humanity. We tell him once more that we do not want to turn our backs on his divine call, that we shall never separate ourselves from him, that we shall remove from our path all that may be an obstacle to our fidelity and that we sincerely wish to be docile to his inspirations. You, in your own heart,

and I in mine—because I am praying intimately with deep silent cries—are telling the child Jesus that we desire to fulfil our duties as well as the servants of the parable, so that we too may hear the response: "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Mt 25:23).

"Then opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, of gold, frankincense and myrrh" (Mt 2:11). Let us pause here a while to understand this passage of the holy Gospel. How is it possible that we, who are nothing and worth nothing, can make an offering to God? We read in the Scriptures: "Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above" (Jas 1:17). Man does not even manage to discover fully the depth and beauty of the Lord's gifts. "If you knew the gift of God!" (Jn 4:10), Jesus exclaims to the Samaritan woman. Jesus Christ has taught us to expect everything from

the Father and to seek first of all the kingdom of God and his justice, and everything else will be given to us in addition, for he knows well what we need (cf. Mt 6:32-33).

In the economy of salvation our Father God looks after each soul with loving care: "Each has his own special gift from God, one of one kind and one of another" (1 Cor 7:7). It would, therefore, seem useless to be concerned about presenting to the Lord something that he has no need of. As debtors who have nothing with which to pay (cf. Mt 18:25), our gifts would be like those of the old law that are no longer acceptable to God: "Sacrifices and oblations and holocausts for sin you have not desired: neither are they pleasing to you" (Heb 10:8).

But the Lord knows full well that giving is a vital need for those in love, and he himself points out what

he desires from us. He does not care for riches, nor for the fruits or the beasts of the earth, nor for the sea or the air, because they all belong to him. He wants something intimate, which we have to give him freely: "My son, give me your heart" (Prov 23:26). Do you see? God is not satisfied with sharing. He wants it all. It's not our things he wants. It is ourselves. It is only when we give ourselves that we can offer other gifts to our Lord.

Let us give him gold. The precious gold we receive when in spirit we are detached from money and material goods. Let us not forget that these things are good, for they come from God. But the Lord has laid down that we should use them without allowing our hearts to become attached to them, putting them to good use for the benefit of all mankind.

Earthly goods are not bad, but they are debased when man sets them up as idols, when he adores them. They are ennobled when they are converted into instruments for good, for just and charitable Christian undertakings. We cannot seek after material goods as if they were a treasure. Our treasure is here, in a manger. Our treasure is Christ and all our love and desire must be centred on him, "for where our treasure is, there will our hearts be also" (Mt 6:21).

We offer frankincense that rises up to the Lord: our desire to live a noble life which gives off the "aroma of Christ" (2 Cor 2:15). To impregnate our words and actions with his aroma is to sow understanding and friendship. We should accompany others so that no one is left, or can feel, abandoned. Our charity has to be affectionate, full of human warmth.

That is what Jesus Christ teaches us. Mankind awaited the coming of the Saviour for centuries. The prophets had announced his coming in a thousand ways. Even in the farthest corners of the earth, where a great part of God's revelation to men was perhaps lost through sin or ignorance, the longing for God, the desire to be redeemed, had been kept alive.

When the fullness of time comes, no philosophical genius, no Plato or Socrates appears to fulfil the mission of redemption. Nor does a powerful conqueror, another Alexander, take over the earth. Instead a child is born in Bethlehem. He it is who is to redeem the world. But before he speaks he loves with deeds. It is no magic formula he brings, because he knows that the salvation he offers must pass through human hearts. What does he first do? He laughs and cries and sleeps defenceless, as a

baby, though he is God incarnate.
 And he does this so that we may fall
 in love with him, so that we may
 learn to take him in our arms.

 We realize once again that this is
 what Christianity is all about. If a
 Christian does not love with deeds,
 he has failed as a Christian, besides
 failing as a person. You cannot think
 of others as if they were digits, or
 rungs on a ladder on which you can
 rise, or a multitude to be harangued
 or humiliated, praised or despised,
 according to circumstances. Be
 mindful of what others are—and first
 of all those who are at your side:
 children of God, with all the dignity
 that marvellous title entails.

 We have to behave as God's children
 toward all God's sons and daughters.
 Our love has to be a dedicated love,
 practised every day and made up of a
 thousand little details of
 understanding, hidden sacrifice and

unnoticed self-giving. This is the "aroma of Christ" that made those who lived among our first brothers in the faith exclaim: See how they love one another!

The ideal is not out of reach. A Christian is no Tartarin of Tarascon, a literary character bent on hunting lions in the corridors of his home, where they were not to be found. I always speak about real daily life, about the sanctification of work, of family bonds, of friendships. If we aren't Christian in these things, where will we be Christian? The pleasant smell of incense comes from some small, hidden grains of incense placed upon the burning charcoal. Likewise is the "aroma of Christ" noticed among men—not in a sudden burst of flame, but in the constant red-hot embers of virtues such as justice, loyalty, faithfulness, understanding, generosity and cheerfulness.

Together with the Magi we also offer myrrh, the spirit of sacrifice that can never be lacking in a Christian life. Myrrh reminds us of the passion of our Lord. On the cross he is offered wine mingled with myrrh (cf. Mk 15:23). And it was with myrrh that his body was anointed for burial (cf. Jn 19:39). But do not think that to meditate on the need for sacrifice and mortification means to add a note of sadness to this joyful feast we celebrate today.

Mortification is not pessimism or bitterness. Mortification is useless without charity. That is why we must seek mortifications which, while helping us develop a proper dominion over the things of this earth, do not mortify those who live with us. A Christian has no warrant to act as torturer, nor should he allow himself to be treated as a feeble wretch. A Christian is a man who knows how to love with deeds

and to prove his love on the touchstone of suffering.

But, I must remind you, mortification does not usually consist of great renunciations, for situations requiring great self-denial seldom occur. Mortification is made up of small conquests, such as smiling at those who annoy us, denying the body some superfluous fancy, getting accustomed to listening to others, making full use of the time God allots us... and so many other details. We find it in the apparently trifling problems, difficulties and worries which arise without our looking for them in the course of each day.

I will finish repeating some words from today's Gospel: "Going into the house they saw the child with Mary, his Mother." Our Lady is always by her Son. The Magi are not received by a king on a high throne, but by a child in the arms of his Mother. Let

us ask the Mother of God, who is our Mother, to prepare for us the way that leads to the fullness of love. *Cor Mariae dulcissimum, iter para tutum:* "Most Sweet Heart of Mary, prepare a safe way!" Her sweet heart knows the surest path for finding Christ.

The three kings had their star. We have Mary, Star of the Sea, Star of the East. We say to her today: Holy Mary, Star of the Sea, Morning Star, help your children. Our zeal for souls must know no frontiers, for no one is excluded from Christ's love. The three kings were the first among the gentiles to be called. But once the redemption had been accomplished, "there is neither male nor female"—there is no discrimination of any type—"for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28).

We Christians cannot exclude anyone; we cannot segregate or classify souls. "Many will come from

the East and West" (Mt 8:11). All find a place in Christ's heart. His arms, as we admire him again in the manger, are those of a child; but they are the same arms that will be extended on the cross drawing all men to himself (cf. Jn 12:32).

And a last thought for that just man, our father and lord St Joseph, who apparently has a very minor role in the Epiphany—as usual. I can imagine him recollected in prayer, lovingly protecting the Son of God made man who has been entrusted to his paternal care. With the marvellous refinement of one who does not live for himself, the holy patriarch spends himself in silent prayer and effective service.

We have talked today about practising a life of prayer and concern for apostolate. Who could be a better teacher for us than St Joseph? If you want my advice,

which I have never tired of repeating these many years, *Ite ad Ioseph*: "Go to Joseph" (Gen 41:55). He will show us definite ways, both human and divine, to approach Jesus. And soon you will dare, as he did, "to take up in his arms, kiss, clothe and look after" (from the prayer to St Joseph as a preparation for holy Mass, found in the Roman Missal), this child God who has been born unto us. As homage of their veneration, the Magi offered gold, frankincense and myrrh to Jesus. Joseph gave his whole youthful and loving heart.

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