

The Epiphany of the Lord: Year B – January 7, 2024

Homily - Gospel: **Mt 2:1-12**

On the Solemnity of Epiphany, the Church continues to contemplate and celebrate the mystery of the birth of Jesus, the Savior. The CCC states (528), "The great feast of Epiphany celebrates the adoration of Jesus by the wise men (magi) from the east." This day accentuates the universal destination and significance of this birth.

By becoming man in Mary's womb, the Son of God did not only come for the People of Israel, represented by the Shepherds of Bethlehem, but also for the whole of humanity, represented by the Magi. The Magi represent all of us! And it is precisely on the Magi and their journey in search of the Messiah that the Church invites us to meditate and pray today.

In Matthew's Gospel, the Magi begin by voicing the reason why they have come: "We have seen his star in the East and have come to worship him." Worship is the end goal of their journey.

Indeed, when they arrived in Bethlehem, "they saw the child with Mary, his mother, and they prostrated themselves and worshiped him." My beloved, if we lose the sense of worship, we lose our direction in the Christian life, which is a journey toward the Lord, not toward ourselves. The Gospel alerts us about this great threat, for alongside the Magi, it presents others who cannot worship.

First, there is King Herod, who uses the word worship only to deceive. He asks the Magi to tell him where the child is to be found "so that I too may come and adore him." The fact is that

Herod worshiped only himself; that is why he wanted to get rid himself of the child through a lie. What does this teach us? It teaches us that when we do not worship God, we end up worshipping ourselves. So, too, the Christian life, when it fails to worship the Lord, can become a mysterious way of affirming ourselves and our abilities: Christians who do not know how to worship, who do not know how to pray by worshipping. This is a grave danger: we use God instead of serving him. How often have we confused the interests of the Gospel with our own? How often have we confused God's power, which is for serving others, with the power of this world, which is for serving ourselves?

In addition to Herod, other people in the Gospel are incapable of worship: who are they? The chief priests and the scribes. They tell Herod with great precision where the Messiah will be born in Bethlehem of Judea. They know the prophecies, and each of them can recite them correctly. They know where to go; they are excellent theologians! But they do not go there. In the Christian life, it is not enough to be knowledgeable, well-informed, or educated: unless we step out of our comfort zone, encounter others, and worship, we cannot know God. Theology and pastoral efficacy mean little or nothing unless we kneel down like the Magi, who were knowledgeable about planning a journey but capable of setting out and bowing down in worship.

My beloved brothers and sisters! Once we worship, we come to realize that faith is not simply a set of acceptable doctrines but a relationship with a living Person whom we are called to love.

When we encounter Jesus' face to face, we see him as he is. Through worship, we discover that the Christian life is a love story with God, where what matters is not our good ideas or personal agenda but our ability to make him the center of our lives, as lovers do with those they love.

This is what the Church ought to be: a worshiper in love with Jesus, her spouse.

As we begin the New Year, may we discover that faith demands worship and commitment. But to worship Jesus, the Savior of the world, we need to come to the temple with a humble, peaceful, joyful, and loving heart so we encounter Him in worship and in those we encounter on our way. If we fall on our knees before Jesus, we will overcome the temptation to set off on our own path. Worship means putting the Lord at the center. It means giving things their proper place and giving the first place to God. Worship means making God's plan more important than our plans, entitlements, and spaces.

It is to accept the teaching of Scripture: "You shall worship the Lord your God" (Mt 4:10). Your God, my God: worship means realizing that you and I and God belong together to one another. It means being able to speak to him freely and intimately. It means bringing our lives to him and letting him enter into them. Worship means discovering that, in order to pray, it is enough to say: "My Lord and my God!" and to let ourselves be filled by his tender love and, at the same time, leave room for the Holy Spirit!

In worship, we allow Jesus to heal our wounds and change us. However, the question here is, do I want to be changed? Am I leaving room for the Holy Spirit to manifest Himself in my life? Are we allowing Jesus to get into our hearts and lives to be changed? Worship means going to

Jesus without a list of petitions but with one request: **to abide with him.** It is about discovering that joy and peace **increase with praise and thanksgiving.** It is to recognize that we are the clay, and He is the potter!

In worship, we make it possible for the Lord to transform us with his love, to kindle a light in our darkness, and to grant us strength in weakness and courage during trials. Worship means focusing on what is essential: delivering ourselves of useless things and addictions that numb the heart and confuse the mind. By contemplating the beauty that irradiates from Jesus Christ as the Magi did, we will learn to reject what should not be worshiped: the God of money, the God of consumerism, the God of pleasure, the God of success, the God of social media, the God of lust, the God of self and many others.

Then and only then, He will be able to conquer our hearts with His Mighty love. My beloved, worship means kneeling before the Almighty God and discovering in his presence that life's greatness does not consist of having **but loving.** Without love, we are nothing! Love is desiring the good of others and rejoicing in their life achievements!

My brothers and sisters! We become what we love! **Saint Matthew said in his Gospel 6: 19-21, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will be your heart be also."**

Worship is recognizing that we are all brothers and sisters before the mystery of a love that bridges every distance: it is to encounter goodness at the source; it is to find in God the courage to draw near to others. Worship involves knowing how to be silent in the presence of the divine word and learning to use words that do not wound but console. Remember, silence is the language of God, and we must learn to listen to Him in silence!

Worship is an act of love that changes our lives. It is to do what the Magi did. To bring gold to the Lord and to tell him that nothing is more precious than he is. Take a moment to look at him at the manger! Do you see how beautiful, tender, and loving He is? (Pause) It is to offer him incense and to say to him that **only in union with him can our lives rise up to heaven**. To present him with myrrh, balm for the wounded, the homeless, and the forgotten, and to promise him that we will aid our excluded and suffering neighbors, in whom he is present. Worship is to let your and my heart be Jesus' manger and let him rest in it!

My brothers and sisters! Every Mass is a Christmas: The incarnate Christ becomes present again in humble form. And every time we come to Mass, it is an Epiphany: The Lord is revealed to us. As pilgrims on a journey, it is up to us to put into practice the words we prayed in today's Psalm: "**Lord, every nation on earth will adore you.**" In worship, we, too, will discern, like the Magi, the meaning of our journey. And like the Magi, we too will experience "a great joy" (Mt2:10). To finish, let us ask God today for a joyful heart and for the gift of His grace for each of us and the whole Church to learn to worship, to continue to worship, and to exercise this prayer of adoration often because **only God is to be adored.**