

Epiphany - B
Isaiah 60:1-6;
Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6;
Matthew 2:1-12
Little Flower - 1/4/15

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of the Epiphany, Jesus' manifestation to the Gentiles symbolized by the Magi.

We cannot help but notice a contrast between Christmas and Epiphany. On Christmas, we celebrated the birth of Jesus Christ and his manifestation to the Jewish people represented by the shepherds. Today we celebrate the deepest meaning of Jesus' Incarnation and birth and his manifestation to the Gentiles represented by the Magi.

The clear message of both Christmas and Epiphany is that Jesus came for all peoples as suggested in today's reading from Paul's Letter to the Ephesians. The shepherds were among the poor and the outcasts in Jewish society. In today's Gospel, magi from the East came to Jesus led by a mysterious star. Who were the magi? Early in the Christian tradition, it was suggested that they were kings or almost kings. Another tradition suggested that they were wise men, knowledgeable in astrology and astronomy. They also had to have had the financial means to make the long journey. In other words, they represented the opposite of what the shepherds represented. They represented the Gentiles, the educated, the powerful, and the wealthy. If Jesus came for all peoples, the Church must be for all peoples.

In today's Gospel, the magi were guided by a mysterious star. However, the reading from Isaiah suggests that Jesus Himself is the true light of the world. Therefore, if we want to be holy and happy, we need to imitate Jesus in our own lives. Because we live 2000 years after he lived, we cannot copy his life. However, we can imitate his life, i.e., we can make our own his attitudes and values and live them in our own lives.

In his *Angelus* talk on the Solemnity of the Epiphany last year, Pope Francis pointed out that "this Feast lets us see a double movement: in one direction, the movement of God towards the world, towards humanity ...and in the other, the movement of men towards God..."¹ The whole history of salvation represents God reaching out to us, culminating in the Incarnation. God could not have become closer to us than by becoming one of us and living among us: "*And the Word became flesh and lived among us...*" [Jn. 1:14; NRSV].

At the same time, we see the movement towards God by the magi who traveled from the East following the mysterious star to find the child whose birth the star announced. We believe that the quest for God is implanted in human nature. As St. Augustine wrote, "My heart will never rest until it rests in you, O Lord."² Consciously or unconsciously, our whole life is a journey seeking God. However, we truly find God only if we find Jesus. Jesus is the object of our desire: "*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*" [Jn. 14:6].

My brothers and sisters, Pope Francis went on to explain that the basis of this dual movement is mutual attraction. On God's part, "it is love for us: we are his children, he loves us and wants to free us from evil, from sickness, from death, and to bring us to his home, to his Kingdom....And from us too there arises a love, a desire: the good always draws us, truth draws us, life, happiness, beauty attracts us... Jesus is the meeting point of this mutual attraction, of this double movement. He is God and man..." As the great St. Irenaeus wrote, "The Son of God became what we are, i.e., human, in order to make us what He is Himself, i.e., sons and daughters of God."³

¹Pope Francis, ANGELUS, Saint Peter's Square, Monday, 6 January 2014, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/angelus/2014/documents/papa-francesco_angelus_20140106.html. All the quotations from Pope Francis come from this talk.

²St. Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 1, Chapter 1.

³St. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, Book V, Preface, paraphrased.