

+ EPIPHANY

Homily given at Our Lady of Clear Creek Abbey

January 6, 2022

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

And entering into the house, they found the child with Mary his mother, and falling down they adored him (Mt. 2).

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,
My very Dear Sons,

On the feast of the Epiphany we remember three mysteries of the Faith, all having to do with Christ's manifestation to the world: the visit of the Magi, the Baptism of the Lord, and the Wedding Feast of Cana, where Jesus performed His first public miracle, turning the water into wine. Of these three mysteries it is the visit of the Magi, the first panel of this mystical triptych, which we contemplate in particular on this sixth day of January, the other two scenes being commemorated in days and weeks to come.

The Holy Father, Pope Francis, has been most adamant about encouraging Catholics to "go out" of themselves and of their comfortable lives in order to bring the Gospel to all the earth. It is interesting in this regard to see how the Infant Jesus, at His birth, while staying in one place, was able to go out to the ends of the earth, bringing the very first announcement of the Gospel to distant lands. This is the first budding of the great work of evangelization, but also a work, as it were, of contemplation.

Of course, Our Little Lord, who is the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity, had, indeed, "gone out" of Heaven in some way already, when He became incarnate, being born of the Blessed Virgin Mary. We might say that he came down from his royal throne as the holy liturgy sings:

While all things were in quiet silence, and the night was in the midst of her course, thy almighty word, O Lord, came from heaven, from thy royal throne. (Wis. 18)

But once upon earth, once He came to be born in Bethlehem, He did not travel by highways in those first days and weeks; He stayed with His Mother. And yet He already reached out, as it were, from that tiny town of Judea, touching men, the Magi, who lived in far-away places. He did it by means of a process we might call spiritual "radiation."

The Greek Philosophers pointed out long ago that the Good puts things in movement, causes them to act, by attraction. Let me explain. A good thing, by its very goodness and its beauty attracts those beings that are capable of appreciating the good and of drawing near to it. This can be on the material level, as a light will attract insects, as food will attract animals, or it can be on the level of spiritual beings, as when a great musician or poet attracts those who wish

to listen to the music or the poetry. And so it is that the Good attracts, it radiates goodness, it puts in motion lovers of the Good. The Good at the Epiphany is really God, God Incarnate.

It was in this way that the Child of Bethlehem became a true missionary, having as His base of operations the Manger. He did not journey to Persia or to other lands where the Magi dwelled, but in His Divine goodness, He and His Father fashioned the star to be a physical sign of the goodness that was in Christ. Something of the goodness of the Savior was in the star that attracted the Magi from the East all the way to Jerusalem and to Bethlehem. The spiritual radiation of the Child was transmitted through the brightness of the heavenly body.

Monastic life functions in this way. Once in a while a monk may be called to perform actual missionary work in far-away places, but habitually he evangelizes by merely radiating something from where he is, from the monastery. The contemplative life acts by means of a spiritual “broad-casting” that attracts souls to itself for their spiritual good in this life and ultimately for their eternal salvation. So it is, as has often been pointed out, that Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus of Lisieux, who never left her tiny convent grounds in Normandy, was nevertheless named co-patron of missions on an equal level with Saint Francis Xavier. The practical means of this spiritual radiation is the holiness of life and, especially, the celebration of the holy liturgy.

For monks to go out onto the highways and byways of the world would be for them to lose their vocation and the precious good of contemplative life. And yet the charity that must animate them cannot be contained. This life of God that daily grows in their souls must truly go out to the Church and share itself with others. Charity is not selfish. Like the Infant Jesus, contemplative souls preach without many words. They preach by means of a very eloquent silence, the silence of adoration in spirit and in truth about which Our Lord spoke to the Samaritan woman near Jacob’s well.

May God grant us all the humility of soul such as the Magi had, in order that we too may come to adore, to worship in spirit and in truth the one true Messiah, cradled in His Mother’s arms. The Church is now much in need of this contemplative witness. The world is dying from hyperactivity, from senseless striving for money and the mirage of earthly power and greatness, not to mention the great confusion that has come about with regard to the spread of the Covid virus and the way it has been handled. May we too, as poor and hidden monks, together with all our friends, radiate in turn, at least in some small way, the truth and love that shine forth from the Child and which illumine and inflame our hearts. Amen. Alleluia.