

HOMILY ~ THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD

JANUARY 6/7, 2024

A young student, 3rd or 4th grade, was asked by his teacher to summarize the first Christmas in a few words. He thought for a minute and then said, “Well, it got dark, and then it got very, very dark, and then Jesus showed up.” That is pretty good, don’t you think? The people who walked in darkness had seen a great light. I think this still happens all of the time in our lives; but I think we can spend much of our lives spiritually asleep, and we miss Jesus when he shows up. I think we need to continue to search for Jesus, a search that lasts our whole lives.

The Magi were certainly searching for Jesus. All they had was a star and a somewhat obscure scripture passage, and they traveled to a distant land to find him. They were clearly not Jewish, so they would not have had that spiritual background. In the Gospel, we also encounter the chief priests and scribes. The Magi told them what they knew. They had access to the same star. They knew the scripture passage very well. They also had all of the Jewish spiritual background and had been looking for the Messiah for many generations; but none of them followed the star to find Jesus. They thought they had it all figured out. They expected the Messiah to come as a powerful king. They were spiritually asleep. They had pretty much stopped searching for Jesus. Then there was Herod. He just wanted to keep the power, authority and control that he already had. He did terrible things to keep it. He killed his wife, his three sons, his mother-in-law and his brother-in-law and all of the male babies born in Bethlehem around the time of Jesus. He did terrible things to keep the status quo. He was not looking for Jesus at all.

So, where are you in your search for Jesus? Some of us are like the Magi and are actively searching for him and are willing to go wherever we need to go to encounter him. Some of us are like the chief priests and scribes. We think we know all we need to know about Jesus, and we are just going through the motions in our spiritual lives, spiritually asleep. Some of us are more like Herod. We are probably not having anyone killed, but we are doing everything we can to make sure there are no changes in our lives and are not open to Jesus showing up and changing anything.

In our spiritual lives, the search for Jesus is never ending. We can always learn more about him, how he works in our lives; and we can grow closer to him. I am going to give you a couple of suggestions on where to look. I find Jesus all of the time at Mass. When I was first ordained, I thought I would get bored celebrating Mass and run out of things to say in the Homily; but 20 years and that has not happened yet. If you come to Mass with the attitude: It is the same old thing, I have heard the readings before, I have heard the same boring Homily and I am just going to get in and out as quickly as possible,

then that is what you will get. Jesus may have shown up, and you were not paying attention. Maybe Jesus showed up in the person that you were supposed to meet, but you missed them because you left after Communion.

I want to go back to the gratitude journal and every day writing down three things you have to be grateful for. If you have been doing this, go back and look at what you have written so far. In how many of them had Jesus shown up? I am grateful for my good health. I exercise and eat healthy, I do my part; but of all of the things that can go wrong in my complicated body, I am healthy. I am grateful to God for sustaining my life. I am grateful for the acts of kindness that I have been able to perform. I am grateful to God for creating the circumstances that allowed me to perform them. I am grateful to God for the accomplishments I have made in my life. I did not accomplish any of them alone. God gave me the charisms I needed and the people I needed to help me. And I am frequently grateful for the people in my life. I am grateful to God for creating them and bringing them into my life. With most of the things I have to be grateful for, Jesus showed up.

I want you to make an addition to your journal. I want you to keep a failure journal. Write down all of your failures as they happen: lost job, broken heart, project failures. Write it down and then leave the rest of the page blank. Hopefully you will not have too many of these. Then I want you to go back in one month and write down what you have learned, what you have gained and how you have grown from this experience. Then go back again in three months, then again in six months and update what you have learned, what you have gained and how you have grown.

You see, it gets dark, and then it gets very, very dark, and then Jesus shows up. Jesus will bring something good from our difficult situations. In fact, we need some of these difficult situations to learn, to gain and to grow. But we must be spiritually awake to find Jesus.

Love and Peace,

Fr. Jim