

Epiphany 2021

- God is a King.
 - And the Savior He sends...comes to rule.
 - Herod knew this...and he trembled.
 - The Wise Men - the 3 kings...
 - they also knew this...
 - but they humbly rejoiced!
- So even before Jesus can talk...
 - He teaches us...a precious truth about ourselves...
 - because in each of our hearts...to the coming of such a King...
 - we find these two responses.
- Herod had spent his entire life...
 - building his personal kingdom...
 - by murdering & extorting...
 - a kingdom that was ruled by his personal whims...
 - and all for his own glory.
 - And as Jesus enters the scene...he immediately feels the threat.
 - If he is not destroyed...
 - it could be the end of all his work.
- The Magi...on the other hand...the 3 kings...
 - they don't fear the demands...
 - that this newborn King makes on them.
 - Instead...they humbly rejoice...
 - that the Savior has come.
 - Instead of hoarding and protecting their treasures...
 - the fruit of their life's hard work...
 - they generously offer it to the Lord...
 - as they pay their homage and respect.
- And whenever Jesus enters our lives...
 - which he does so every day...
 - through the teachings of His Church...
 - through the workings of Divine Providence...
 - or whisperings of the Holy Spirit in prayer...
 - each time that happens...
 - we too must choose...
 - in whose steps we will follow...
 - either Herod's or the Magi's.

- St. Augustine builds on this basic principal...in his work the *City of God*...he said:
 - *What we see, then, is that two societies have issued from two different kinds of love Worldly society has flowered from a selfish love which dared to despise even God, whereas the communion of saints is rooted in a love of God that is ready to trample on self. In a word, this latter relies on the Lord, whereas the other boasts that it can get along without Him.*
- So there are two different kingdoms.
 - And with each decision we make...
 - we become more and more entrenched...
 - as a member of one of them.
 - But while both of these exist in the here and now...
 - only one of them will last forever.
- And that's one of the things the devil hates most...
 - about the Catholic Church...
 - about the Kingdom of God...here on earth.
 - No matter how much damage he causes it...
 - from corruption inside...
 - or persecution outside...
 - the Church not only continues to survive...but even to thrive!
- About 100 years ago...
 - there was an attempt to stamp out the Catholic Church in Mexico.
 - In 1917...
 - they adopted the world's first...socialist constitution...
 - and the president...much like Herod...
 - began a ruthless effort...
 - to put all the power...into his own government's hands.
 - This led to mass executions of his personal enemies...
 - and a whole lot of suffering for us Catholics.
 - Churches were...
 - destroyed...desecrated...or turned into barracks...for the use of the army.
 - Soldiers got drunk from the chalices...
 - used the statues for firewood...
 - and other religious works...for target practice.
 - At one point...all of the bishops were exiled...
 - while priests were either...forced underground...
 - or they were imprisoned...and executed.
 - the most famous of these...was Fr. Miguel Pro.
- Educated and ordained in Europe...
 - he returned to his homeland in 1926...
 - knowing full well what he would face.
 - But he outsmarted the authorities for an entire year...
 - before finally being caught...and dying in front of a firing squad.

- The government invited the press to his execution...
 - hoping to film this young priest...
 - begging for mercy with his last breath...
 - so they could use that coverage...to discourage everyone else.
- But instead...
 - they saw the saint...walk out bravely...
 - asking only to be able pray.
 - And after a few minutes...he stood up...
 - extended his arms in the form of a cross...
 - and with a calm...steady voice...pronounced his last words:
 - *Viva Cristo Rey!*
 - *Long live Christ the King!*
- And that's what the Magi...
 - are much more gently...reminding us of today:
 - that Christ's Kingdom...the Church...
 - is an everlasting...universal Kingdom.
 - And it's membership...it's open to everyone...
 - but not just anyone.
 - Because in order to join...
 - in fact...in order to really remain...
 - we must humble ourselves like the Magi...
 - renouncing the god that is our self...
 - and promising our full homage and devotion...
 - to the one true God and King.
- My brothers and sisters...the only difference...
 - between a mediocre...lukewarm Catholic...
 - and a saint...is tiny.
 - The lukewarm Catholic...believes in the Kingdom of God...
 - as we all do...or we wouldn't be here today.
 - But the saint is someone lives...
 - in accordance with that belief.
- So if God's Kingdom is the only thing that lasts...
 - then like the Magi...like Miguel Pro...
 - our first priority in life should be...
 - serving that Kingdom no matter what...
 - To offer God our talents and efforts...symbolized by the gold...
 - to offer our prayer and worship...symbolized by the incense...
 - and offer even our sufferings...symbolized by the myrrh.
- So as we receive our Lord in Holy Communion today...
 - let's ask for the grace...to more fully lay down our lives...at His feet...
 - that our hearts...may more fully burn...with His zeal and His love.