

Homily Epiphany – (Year C) – January 6, 2019

IS 60:1-6; PS 72:1-2, 7-8, 10-11, 12-13; EPH 3:2-3A, 5-6; MT 2:1-12

Back in **2008**, during his visit to the United States, **Pope Benedict XVI** said:

Perhaps America’s brand of secularism poses a particular problem: it allows for professing belief in God, and respects the public role of religion and the Churches, but at the same time it can subtly reduce religious belief to a lowest common denominator. Faith becomes a passive acceptance that certain things “out there” are true, but without practical relevance for everyday life.

https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2008/april/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080416_response-bishops.html

Interesting statement.

But what does it have to do with our celebration of the **Epiphany**, our commemoration of the visit of the **Magi** to the infant Jesus...and to Mary and Joseph?

The answer is in Pope Benedict’s **last** sentence. Listen to it again:

Faith becomes a passive acceptance that certain things “out there” are true, but without practical relevance for everyday life.

When we consider the *circumstances* of the **Epiphany**, we might be tempted to think of this **event** as having a sort of “*out there*” *fairly-tale* quality which looks good on a **Christmas card**, but which doesn’t have an “**practical relevance for [our] everyday life**”.

But that would be a serious mistake—because such a point-of-view ignores the fact that the **Bible** is the **living Word of God**—a word that has relevance for every **age** and every **people**...including for **you**...and **me**...*today*.

To see what relevance the **Epiphany** has for us, let’s consider the words of **another** pope—this one a canonized saint—**Pope St. Leo the Great!**

Preaching on this same feast of the **Epiphany**, **Pope Leo** said:

The obedience of the star calls us to imitate its humble service: to be servants, as best we can, of the grace that invites all men to find Christ...Dear friends, you must have the same zeal to be of help to one another; then, in the kingdom of God...you will shine as children of the light... <http://www.liturgies.net/Liturgies/Catholic/loh/christmas/epiphany/officeofreadings.htm>

What **humble service** did the star render?

It **guided** the Magi—who knew a little something of Jesus...it guided them *to* Jesus...to **meet** Jesus...and to invite them to **become** part of **his** kingdom.

In short, the star *evangelized!*

Still *another* Pope—this one **also** a saint—**St. John Paul II**—coined a term that, by now, should be very familiar to us—the “**New Evangelization**”.

We hear this term “**New Evangelization**” but how many people really know what it means?

Essentially, the **New Evangelization** is a *re-proposing of the Gospel* in parts of the world—like the *United States*—that were **once** solidly Christian, but which have **succumbed** to **paganism** or **secularism**.

In the **2nd Reading**—from his **Letter to the Ephesians**—**St. Paul** writes of the special mission to evangelize the *he* received directly from **Jesus Christ**:

...you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for your benefit, [namely, that] the mystery was made known to me by revelation...that the Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. (Eph 3:2-3, 6)

Just as the **star** attracted **pagans**—the *magi*—to an encounter with Jesus—in a similar manner, **St. Paul** attracted **non-Jews** to a relationship with Jesus.

Both circumstances demonstrate that the **saving power of Jesus** and the **faith that flows from his life, death and resurrection**, were meant for *everyone*, beginning with the **Jews**, but extending far beyond the Jewish people—to people of every nation.

Back in **St. Paul's time**, there was a greater **novelty** to the Christian faith than there is **today**, because so much of the world in Paul's time had not heard the Gospel.

Things are different today because the majority of the world knows **something** of the Gospel, though perhaps little more than its **existence**. Still **others** have **heard** the Gospel but **rejected** it.

Both **Pope St. Leo the Great** and **St. Paul** help us see that *each of us*—as a Baptized and Confirmed Christian—**has a mission**—a *stewardship*—to introduce others to Jesus.

The **1st Reading** from the **Prophet Isaiah** can help us see why the **mission is needed**, especially considering the **sad state** of **our Church**...and of **our world**... today.

God said through the **Prophet Isaiah**:

Rise up in splendor, Jerusalem! Your light has come, the glory of the Lord shines upon you. See, darkness covers the earth, and thick clouds cover the peoples; but upon you the LORD shines, and over you appears his glory. Nations shall walk by your light... (Isa 60:1-3)

Like the star that guided the Magi to the infant Jesus, **we too** are called to **shine** the **Light of Christ** into this **dark world**...and **hurting Church**...in order to draw others to Jesus—**today**.

The trouble with most Catholics today is that **they**—*we*—feel *ill-equipped* for the mission. After all, how many of us have **advanced degrees in theology**, or **expertise in apologetics** to do this effectively?

Probably very few.

But **concern about qualifications** misses the point, because evangelization—**sharing the Gospel**—does **not require** advanced **degrees** or specialized **training**.

It simply requires a *willingness to share what Jesus means to us...with others!*

So, then...**how** do we do this?

Let me suggest **three ways** to evangelize that **anyone** can put into action *today*.

Two of these ideas came from articles that appeared this past week on the **Catholic websites**. The **third** is something *particular to our parish*.

All three can be part of a **New Year's Resolution** that will have **eternal benefits** far exceeding the typical resolutions to exercise and eat right.

- The **first** resolution is to wear a visible Crucifix.

Parallel example: Precious Feet with Crown of Thorns

- The **second** resolution is to invite someone **to...or back to...Mass**.

Caveat: Discuss the sensitivities around Holy Communion

- The **third** is to make a gift to Bishop Olmsted's **Evangelization and Discipleship Campaign**.

Update on the campaign:

- Goal: **\$1.7M**
- **\$1,319,530** (78% of goal)
- **268** families (less than 9% of parishioners. *91% have given nothing*)
- **\$4,920** average five-year pledge

Thank you to every one of you who has made a gift to the campaign. And thank you to all the parishioners and staff who have worked so hard to get us where we are today.

If the **rest of the parish families**—who have **not yet given** to the campaign—gave just **10% of the average gift** we would *exceed* our goal by **\$1M!**

Nothing is more tragic than a person who does nothing because they can only do a little.

Clearly, what is needed is not **wealth**. What is needed is *generosity*.

Pledge cards in pew.

If you have not yet made your gift to the campaign, please take a card and fill it out **before leaving the Church today**. You can drop it off at the **campaign table** in the courtyard **after Mass**.

Each one of us is called to be the light of Christ in our own circle of influence whether that be in our **family**, our **school**, our **workplace**, where we **exercise** or **recreate**.

The **Epiphany**—as we now can see—is much more than a **quaint scene** on a **Christmas Card**.

The Epiphany is our opportunity to **worship Jesus Christ** and to **honor the faithfulness** of those who have **accepted** and **carried out** their **personal mission** to build up the Kingdom of God by drawing others into a relationship with Jesus.

As we enter into this new year, we can **lament** the dark state of the world...and the troubles in the Church...but **do nothing to change it**.

Or, we can follow the beautiful example of those who radiate the light of Christ into the darkness and change **everything**—including *themselves*.

I've lost count of how many times I've said or heard "**Happy New Year!**" already this week.

Imagine how much **happier** this new year will be—for **us**—and for **others**—if we commit to making 2019 a **Holy New Year**...by faithfulness to our *stewardship of God's grace* (cf. Eph 3:2)...to be **agents of evangelization**...to **radiate the light of Christ** to others...with **courage**...and with **joy**.