

January 3, 2021

Epiphany of The Lord

Some years ago, I read an article that compared the Christmas and Easter seasons by using the word Passover. We are all used to the word Passover as term associated with Easter. You probably know that Easter is the more ancient feast, which the Church began to observe in the second century. The recorded Christmas celebration was in Rome in the fourth century in the year 336 AD. Here is how the article made the comparison. The Easter Triduum begins with Jesus celebrating the Passover meal with his disciples on the night before he died and he fulfills the meaning of that ancient Jewish tradition by saying, "Do this in memory of me." This is the first Passover, from life to death on the cross. The next Passover is his passing from death and being buried in the tomb, to the empty tomb and resurrected life. Jesus then passes over from making appearances in his resurrected body to ascending to the right hand of the Father. He then "passes over" the Holy Spirit into the hearts of the disciples at Pentecost, they "pass-over" from being a confused, frightened group confined to Jerusalem and Galilee to confident preachers who preach the gospel to the whole world. The entire event of Jesus life, death, resurrection, ascension into heaven and Pentecost is what we call the paschal mystery, referring to the blood of the Sacrificial lambs that Moses instructed the people of Israel to sprinkle over their doorposts so that the angel of death would pass over them.

Christmas has its own kind of Passover. Jesus passes from heaven to earth when is born into poverty in Bethlehem. The wood of the manger prefigures the wood of the cross. Today, on Epiphany, we celebrate another "Passover" that he is born not just to be the messiah, or the king for the people of Israel, rather is born for all nations. This Epiphany or manifestation, or showing, is passing from the former way of thinking that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of Moses and all the prophets is more than just the God of one nation. Jesus is born for all nations and the Magi who look to heaven, who look to the light of the star, come from foreign lands in search of the newborn king.

The meaning of Epiphany for us is that we, who are come from many backgrounds and points of view, perspectives that can lead to many divisions, need to keep coming to Jesus. That is what the magi do they go to Jesus. They adored him and prostrated themselves before him. Notice that when they have the audience with

King Herod, there is no mention that they prostrated themselves before him. Bear in mind, Herod was a powerful and cruel leader. Many suffered at his hands. He even executed three of his own sons. The encounter was formal and one could imagine it being cold with the sense of something not being quite right about his spoken intention to adore the newborn king as well. However, the encounter with Jesus, Mary and Joseph is entirely different. It was a deep personal encounter of love, peace, joy and hope. An encounter that was beyond their expectations that is why they fell prostrate and laid their gifts to the newborn king.

Pope Francis keeps telling us to be a church for the poor that goes out. That is the meaning of Pentecost. He says that when we become focused on our on ourselves we will become sick. That is what happened to Herod. He also says that we need to have a personal encounter with Jesus; we need to go to him constantly. That is the experience of Epiphany, the Magi who looked to heaven, who searched, who traveled a long distance, who asked questions to find more knowledge and finally found Jesus. We cannot just make a personal encounter with Jesus happen. Jesus is a gift that opens in God's perfect time. We have to be diligent as were the Magi, in our search. This is the year of the word of God. We need to search for Jesus in the Scriptures. This is the year of the Eucharist. We need see for the Lord in the Eucharist, even if it is only online for now. We need to search for him in our daily prayer, which strengthens our friendship with him.

We need Epiphany to live Pentecost. We can only give what we have received. We live the experience of Epiphany when we go to Jesus and we live experience of Pentecost when we share what we have received with others. Keep going to Jesus with everything. When we give ourselves to him, he will not fail to give himself to us. When he gives himself to us, we have a gift that will change our lives. Jesus is the gift of the personal love of God, a gift that finds its meaning when we share what we have received.