

Misusing Information

The Epiphany of the Lord

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Fr. Tony Davis

We may have had the experience of giving someone information, and to our surprise and astonishment, they misused it. Maybe it was personal information, a sensitive topic, or something that wasn't supposed to be widely known yet. What seemed so innocent and genuine on behalf of the receiver turned out to be so dishonest and cunning.

In our Gospel from *Matthew*, King Herod tried to do just that. Upon hearing that the magi, or wise people from the east, were in the area looking for the newborn king, he befriended them. As the passage says, "Herod called the magi secretly and ascertained from them the time of the star's appearance." Acting innocently enough, he asked them what they knew. He claimed that he needed to know so he too could go and do homage. So as the magi set out on the final leg of their journey, they agreed to come back to King Herod and give him the information.

That is where the passage ends, but the next passage in the Gospel is called 'The Flight Into Egypt.' In that passage, King Herod's real intentions are made known. An angel appears to Joseph in a dream and says, "rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him." King Herod didn't want to do homage, he wanted to kill. No one, especially this child everyone was talking about, was going to threaten his kingship.

Thankfully, as we are told today, after the magi found the child, they had a dream warning them not to return to King Herod. They ended up going home a different way, thus not giving him the information as to the baby's location, information that he clearly was going to misuse.

While I'd like to think that none of us have hidden intentions as evil as King Herod, misusing information is extremely common. Whether it is through gossip, seeking revenge on a former friend, or buying into fake news, misusing information can do a lot of harm to people and our relationships. It is not truthful.

The psychiatrist M. Scott Peck had an interesting definition of evil people. He saw evil people not primarily as sinners in our traditional sense- murderers, adulterers, or robbers- but as the people who lie. In fact, not only do they lie, but their very lives have become a lie itself. He says, “the evil are ‘the people of the lie,’ deceiving others as they also build layer upon layer of self-deception.” (*People of the Lie*, 66) King Herod seems to fit that definition. Liars are experts at misusing information...and that is not a compliment!

Misusing information is a very dangerous habit to get into because it makes us liars.

Do I misuse the information that others have entrusted to me?

Let us get rid ourselves of any traces of King Herod in our lives. Lying corrupts us. Instead, let us be more like the magi, the ones who didn't misuse information, but used information.