

Fr. Mike's message WEEK ONE Epiphany Jan. 3 2021

Happy New Year!

Welcome to 2021.

I don't think I've ever been so happy for a new year to begin.

Last year was awful in so many ways -

ways that none of us could have imagined just one year ago.

For me, it all began on Friday March 13, 2020.

Yes, "*Friday the Thirteenth*" was the day when everything changed in an instant.

The Lenten season had just begun.

The parish staff and I had spent months preparing for all our Lent and Easter celebrations.

And then on March 13th everything began shutting down due to the pandemic - schools closed and Masses were cancelled.

It's like someone flipped a switch from ON to OFF.

What now?

All of my routines - all of the ways I was accustomed to worshipping, ministering and connecting with parishioners was disrupted.

In those first few days, I felt stuck.

SCREEN: Unstuck main screen

Today we are beginning a new message series titled, Unstuck.

And I think this title captures what so many people are hoping for in the new year.

And I'm not referring to being physically stuck - like 'stuck at home' because of the pandemic.

Here's what we mean:

after the year we've been through we can all find ourselves feeling a little 'stuck' emotionally and spiritually - we're unsure of where to go, what to do, and how to channel our emotions and energy.

What could being 'stuck' look like for you?

Maybe you're stuck in anger over a hurt that you haven't moved past.

Maybe you are stuck with sadness or regret over things you wish you'd done.

Or maybe you feel stuck in your spiritual life -
wanting to experience more joy or contentment.

Feeling stuck in ways like these can lead to unhealthy ways to cope like
binging on food, TV, alcohol, or drugs.

So over the next month, we will hear what God and scripture have to say
about how to get unstuck from whatever keeps us from making
progress in our lives and our faith.

SCREEN: Wise men image

And to get us started, we have some amazing role models in the
travelers we met in today's Gospel.

Every year on Epiphany we hear the story of the magi.

They were astrologers from the east who saw a new star in the night sky,
correctly determined that it meant a new king had been born,
and set out to find him.

That one sentence description makes their journey sound so easy,
but it wasn't.

I said this last year but it really bears repeating:
the work of astrologers did not involve travel.

It was sedentary, stationary.

Look up, observe, interpret.

It could all be done from one place.

And yet, the discovery of what the magi saw in the heavens one night
was so earth-shaking that they could not remain where they were.

They had to move.

The reason I say that they are perfect role models for us is because
the magi were never stuck.

They were always on the lookout for signs
and when they saw one, they responded.

They left the comfort of home, left behind their normal routines,
their usual ways of doing things and
set out for somewhere new and unknown.

And because they did, the magi were among the very first to behold the newborn king and do him homage.

What jumps out to me in their story is the number of times their course changed, and how open they were to going in a new direction.

Their first course correction came in Jerusalem.

The magi assumed they would find the newborn king in King Herod's palace.

But when they got new information - when they learned that the prophecy foretold that the king would come from Bethlehem - they changed direction.

After finding the child and realizing their search was over, they were told in a dream to head home by a different route.

Another course correction, another change to their plan.

What I love is that none of these changes left them paralyzed with fear or anger or sadness - no, they simply made adjustments and moved on.

This is why the magi have so much to teach us about how to get unstuck from whatever is keeping us from making progress.

When I look at my life over the past year,

I know that when I was willing to let go of my plans, my agenda, and my schedule, I discovered God's plan for my life.

Here's one lesson I've learned that has really helped.

I discovered I need to:

SCREEN: pay attention to tension

That can be a tongue twister: pay attention to tension.

To help you understand what I mean by this phrase, let's take another look at the story of the magi.

Their encounter with King Herod could not have been a comfortable one.

After all, they were foreigners, who were not Jewish, telling him something he did not know:

a king had been born in his country.

The Gospel reading said that the magi's news 'greatly troubled'

Herod and all Jerusalem.

And this tension was something the magi had to notice and respond to.

And they did.

After offering their gifts to the baby Jesus,
they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod.

And because they were open to God's prompting,
they returned home by another route thereby keeping the baby Jesus from harm's reach.

When we pay attention to tension, we learn things about ourselves
and others that can be very revealing.

Because whatever is causing you tension in your life -
whatever makes you upset or angry or sad is telling you something important.

Medical experts and counselors know this.

It's how they figure out treatment plans for their clients.

They have been trained to ask the right questions and observe what is
happening *outside* of someone so they can heal what is hurting *inside*.

Spiritually, this is also true.

Tension can be a spiritual wake up call.

It can be God's way of preventing you from becoming your own worst enemy.

If you're like me, there have probably been moments in your life when
you were not attuned to the tension you were experiencing

and it led to poor decisions; maybe with loved ones or your career -
decisions you wish you could undo.

So ask yourself these questions,

What is causing me tension right now?

What has me feeling 'stuck'?

What is keeping me from making progress in my life

and in my relationships with God and others?

Be willing to face it, to name it, so God can help you get unstuck.

When you are feeling tense, it's best to pause so you can understand
where it's coming from and what it may be telling you.

If you take the time to do this, you can be like the magi -

you can hear God speaking to you and then, like them, take another path.

There's is a phrase you've heard me say a lot in 2020,
but it really applies to today's message about getting unstuck:

SCREEN: God has a plan for your life

On March 13 of last year, it was hard to see God's plan - for me or the parish.

The easiest option would have been to do nothing, to stayed closed,
just wait it out and hope for the best - *many pastors did*.

Instead, I decided to go in a new direction.

I got unstuck and haven't looked back.

I'm not telling you this to win your praise.

The parish and I simply did what other churches and businesses did.

We did what you probably did.

I all let go of my plans, my agendas and routines
and allowed God to lead me somewhere new.

It hasn't been easy.

There have been many tense moments.

The very first weekend that we offered online worship,

I was terrified - more nervous than I'd ever been saying Mass.

At times it's been painful as I've been stretched in unimaginable ways.

But it's also been exciting - there have been rays of light and moments of joy.

Our online Christmas Mass is the most recent example that comes to mind.

So believe that God has a plan and allow God to point the way for you.

Now let me offer some ways how.

Throughout this series, there will be some 'homework' for you to do
- optional of course - but a way for you to dive deeper into the message.

Each week I'll give you a reflection question and encourage you
to write out your answer.

Here is your question for this week:

SCREEN: In what areas of your life do you feel stuck?

Do you feel stuck because of a personal issue, a family crisis,
a work or school problem, a spiritual struggle?

In what areas of your life do you feel stuck?

Take some time this week to reflect on this question:
pray about it, write out your answer and keep it someplace safe.
And my second suggestion for this week is to take some time to
adore God.

The magi met Christ and they paid him homage, they adored him.

SCREEN: Adore event announcement screen

This coming Friday evening at 7pm, I hope you will join us
for an online event called Adore.

It's an opportunity to praise and adore God through
scripture, prayer, music and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.

There will also be quiet time so you can
ask God for whatever you need this year.

So that's online this coming Friday at 7pm.

Last year on Epiphany,

I had no idea what the future would hold for me or our parish.

And the same is true today because none of us can
look up at the stars and predict the future.

And that's okay.

God asks us to simply focus on today -

today, when God is with us, God loves us and God has a plan.

This Epiphany of 2021, be willing to head off in a new direction.

Allow God to help you get unstuck. Amen. +