

The Epiphany of the Lord/Inauguration of the “Year of the Eucharist”

January 5, 2020

11:30 a.m.

St. Augustine Cathedral

Well, first of all, on this first Sunday of 2020, I want to wish all of you a very Happy New Year. May this new year be a time of great blessing, good health, and much happiness for you and all your families. But I also want to wish you all a very Happy Feast of the Epiphany, the 12th Day of Christmas. With this Feast, the Church focuses our attention on the three Magi, who truly complete the account of the Birth of Jesus that we’ve been celebrating over these last 10 days. While some of you have probably already taken down your Christmas tree, and perhaps put away many of the Decorations, here in our Cathedral and in churches throughout the Diocese, the Christmas Season continues for one more week until next Sunday’s Feast of the Baptism of the Lord.

In many ways, this Feast of the Epiphany is really the high-point, and the most important part, of what Christmas is all about. From what the Gospels tell us, other than the Shepherds who were the first to hear---in very dramatic fashion by a Choir of Angels---the Good News of the Birth of the “*Savior of the world, Who is Christ and Lord*”, no one else knew this amazing news.

God had placed the Christmas Star in the Heavens so that all who were so inclined, could be led to find this Christ-Child. St. Matthew is the only one to tell us about these “Magi”. We know next to nothing about them, other than the sketchy information Matthew tells us: that they traveled from “the East”, which meant their journey was difficult and long; and they were sure the Star was a sign of a new King, which is why they came with precious gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to give the King. From there, tradition and folk-lore fill in all the other details that have become near and dear to our hearts thru stories, songs, and annual Christmas pageants.

But we can surmise that these Magi were adventurous; they were courageous; and most importantly, they could certainly be described as pioneers, or “seekers”---they were willing to go wherever the Star led them so that they could seek after whatever truth would be revealed to them. Never, in their wildest dreams of course, could they have known that this Star would lead them to “Truth” itself, in this Baby, Jesus, --- the One the Angels introduced as “*Savior...Christ and Lord*”.

This Feast of Epiphany is the “high point” of the Christmas Story because these Magi--- these “3 Wise Men or 3 Kings” as we prefer to call them---represent the fact that, now, the whole world knew about Jesus’ Birth. Not just the Jewish Bethlehem Shepherds, or even all those in the Jewish world---known as the “Chosen People”. One fact we do know about the Magi is that they were not Jews; they were Gentiles; they were Pagans. They did not profess belief in the God Who revealed Himself to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, or in the Prophets of Old. But they saw the Star, and followed it, and came to know that this Baby is the Son of the God of all the Universe, sent into the world, born to be the Savior for all people, in all times and place; these Magi came to understand the Truth of this, the greatest news in the history of the world.

That’s what St. Paul meant in today’s Second Reading when he wrote about this “*mystery*” which was revealed to the world. Jesus came to be “*Christ and Lord*”, not just for the Jewish People, but for ALL people. As St. Paul wrote: “*The Gentiles are now co-heirs, members of the same body, and co-partners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel.*”

Jesus' Birth as Savior of the world was truly God's greatest Gift to the world---until then. After Jesus grew up, and after He accomplished what He was Born to do----when He suffered, died and rose from the dead on Easter for the salvation of the world---that Gift was even greater.

But dear Friends, as we gather together here this morning, we have something even greater right here. Every Sunday---every time we gather in Faith to celebrate this Holy Mass--- we get to receive the One Who IS the Gift---we get to receive the Gift of Jesus Himself in the Holy Eucharist. THAT is the greatest news of all.

An extremely important question that we need to ask ourselves is: how do we receive this great Gift; how do we react to this Gift of Jesus' Real Presence with us in the Holy Eucharist, Jesus' Gift of Himself to be our spiritual Food and Drink?

We're all familiar with the national statistics that tell us that there is a general decline in people coming to Church, in all religions. Sadly, that is true for us as Catholics as well, nationally and here in our Diocese. Perhaps only 1/3 of our Catholic Family regularly comes to Mass, even though coming to Mass each week remains a very serious obligation for all Catholics. What does that mean? How can we say "no thank you" to this Great Gift that Jesus gives us---the Gift of Himself?

In addition, you probably heard about a recent Pew Research study which found that many Catholics---perhaps as high as 60%---don't believe that Jesus is REALLY Present in the Eucharist; that the Presence is only symbolic. So, just to be clear: our Catholic Faith teaches us that the Holy Eucharist IS the true, Real Presence of Jesus Himself. The Gospels clearly teach that Jesus intended to remain with us by giving us Himself in the Eucharist, which He instituted at the Last Supper, and fulfilled with the complete Gift of Himself on Calvary. Our Catholic Faith further teaches us that, thru the action of the Priest who receives the authority from Christ, the miracle of Jesus' Gift of Himself is realized in every Mass.

When the Magi came into the Presence of the Child Jesus, they could see with their "eyes of Faith" that this was truly the Son of God. That's why St. Matthew tells us that before they gave their precious gifts of gold, frankincense or myrrh, or did anything else, they **prostrated** themselves. The only One before Whom we would, or should, prostrate ourselves is God. They realized that this Child was the Son of God.

When we come to Mass---when we listen to the Scripture Readings---when we prayerfully participate in the prayers of the Mass, and kneel through the Eucharistic Prayer----when we come forward to receive the Gift of the Eucharist---we are in the Presence of God, and we are receiving the very Body and Blood of Jesus Christ Himself.

In light of all that, and because I firmly believe that all of us---beginning with me, all our priests and deacons, and all our Faithful people---need to renew our understanding of, reverence for, and belief in the incredibly Great Gift the Eucharist is----here in our Diocese beginning today, we are inaugurating a special "*Year of the Eucharist*". This "*Year*" will allow all of us time---throughout this calendar year---to recapture (if we've lost) or to develop (if we've never had) a fervor, a devotion, a love for the great Gift of the Eucharist.

In addition to that, it is my great hope that with a renewed understanding, devotion, and love for Jesus Present in the Eucharist, that we will ALSO come to a greater openness to, and be motivated by, what *the mission of the Eucharist* is for each of us. At the end of every Mass, we are "dismissed"---we are "sent on mission". We're not just told to "Go", or "go back to the way

you were before you came here”; we’re all told to “go in peace, go glorifying the Lord by your lives, go and announce the Gospel of the Lord”. We’re told to go with a new purpose; we’re sent *on mission*. And the *mission* that Jesus gives to each of us is for us to love God with all our hearts/souls/minds/strength; AND, to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

Love is sweet; love is special; love is tender But, as we all know, Love is also hard, challenging, and sometimes painful! For us to truly love God, or for us to actually love our neighbor the way Jesus wants us to love, means that we can’t just do that on our own. Because we know that when Jesus told us to love our “neighbors”, He didn’t just mean those who live next door to us---even though some of those “neighbors” can also be pretty challenging at times. No, when Jesus said “neighbor”, He meant everyone---all people---including those who may have hurt us; even those who are our enemies.

For us to be able to fulfill the “*mission*” that each of us is given thru our Baptism, we NEED Jesus’ Help. And He gives us that help in the Eucharist. He gives us Himself to be the spiritual nourishment we **need** to help us love, both God and our neighbors.

My dear Family of Faith, I ask you, and all the members of our Catholic Family throughout our Diocese, to please join with me and enter into this “*Year of the Eucharist*” with the openness, the courage, the generosity, and the adventurous nature of the Magi whom we celebrate today---those who chose to respond to God’s Greatest News, willing to go anywhere, do anything, take any risks, so that they could find this Good News. May we do the same in regard to this Great Gift of the Eucharist. May we “see” with the “eyes of Faith” Jesus truly Present in the Bread and Wine which Sacramentally become the Body and Blood of Christ. May we prostrate our hearts and our spirits in the Presence of this Great Gift, Who is God Himself.

As our Gospel told us today, the Magi *departed for their country by another way*. That really means that they were changed in the depths of their beings having encountered Jesus, the Savior of the World. May we pray that every time we leave Holy Mass, having received and been in the Real Presence of Jesus Himself, that we too will be changed, and go back to our homes, our work, and our daily responsibilities in a new way, with mind and heart renewed. May we willingly, generously, compassionately, and courageously continue our “*mission*” to love God and our neighbor.

God bless you, now and always!