



The Baptism of the Lord January 11, 2015 B

- **Four Lessons from the Magi's Journey**
- **Some Prayers and Quotes to Ponder**
- **Why Catholics Baptize Infants**

Last weekend on the Feast of the Epiphany, I named four qualities that were present in the lives of the Magi that could be helpful to us in our journey through life.

1) Perseverance. On their long and arduous journey, the Magi needed the virtue of perseverance to help them stay the course and not quit and turn back. I told the story of Winston Churchill's three-word address to college graduates: "Never—Give—Up." In the journey of life, we face various challenges with our faith, our relationships, our health, in striving to achieve some goal. During such times, we need the Magi's virtue of perseverance to help us to keep going when we want to quit.

2) Humility to ask for help and direction. When the Magi arrived in Jerusalem, they asked: "Where is the newborn King of the Jews?" If the Magi had been too proud to seek help in locating Jesus, they never would have found him.

In the journey of life, all of us need help and direction at different times with different issues, e.g., with a loss of some kind, with an important decision, with a relationship or financial issue. If we are like the Magi, we will not hesitate to seek help and direction. We will not allow pride or a self-sufficient attitude to stop us from reaching out for help.

3) Openness to finding what we are looking for in unexpected places. If the Magi had been locked into believing that a newborn king could only be born in a palace, they would never have found Jesus in a stable—surely an unexpected place for a King to be born.

If we are the type of person who cannot think 'outside the box' or believe that God's plan for us might be very different from what we have in mind, we may miss out big time. It is always helpful to be open to God's 'strange ways.'

4) Having a relationship with our Inner Guide. After the Magi had finished their visit with Jesus, they were told in a dream *not* to go back by the same route that they had come. If they were the type of people who

did not listen to their inner voice or guide, they would have jeopardized the life of Jesus.

The Holy Spirit is our divine Inner Guide given to us to help us in all kinds of ways. But if we have little or no relationship with the Holy Spirit, we will miss out big time.

I frequently seek the help of the Holy Spirit with the 'stuff of my life,' and I trust that in asking he will help me—whether I recognize his help or not. The following is a beautiful prayer to the Holy Spirit by St. Augustine.

*Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit,
that my thoughts may all be holy.
Act in me, O Holy Spirit,
that my work, too, may be holy.
Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit,
that I love but what is holy.
Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit,
to defend all that is holy.
Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit,
that I always may be holy.
Amen.*

A final insight. Matthew's story about the Magi tells us that after their encounter with Jesus, the Magi returned to their home by a *different route*. The 'different route' may symbolize how our lives can or should take a *different direction* after encountering Jesus. Having a personal relationship with him should mean that our lives are more God-centered, more loving, more generous, more forgiving, more joyful. If they are not, we have reason to question the realness or authenticity of our relationship with him.

A Parent's Prayer for Children

*Heavenly Father,
I commend my children to you.
Supply in them whatever is wanting in me
through weakness or negligence.
Help my children to resist the temptations
of the world, the flesh and the devil.
Help them to know your truth and walk in it.
Pour your grace and love into their hearts,
that they may be drawn to you in all things.*

Finally, dear Lord, help me to have a positive and healthy relationship with my children. This I pray through Jesus your Son and by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

A lawyer friend of mine and his wife have told me that for years they have been praying the following *morning prayer* every day, which I wrote several years ago.

One unnamed person sent me a beautiful gratitude card this Christmas saying:

I have placed your morning prayer on our refrigerator for all our family to read each morning. Since beginning this habit, my days are blessed beyond measure.

Morning Prayer

*Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
I come into your loving presence
with gratitude for another day.
I thank you for the blessings in life
that I tend to take for granted:
food, shelter, health, family,
work and faith in you.*

*May I live this day in a manner
that pleases you,
and helps me to become the person
you created me to be.*

*Help me to recognize and respond generously
to the promptings of the Holy Spirit
in the events and encounters of this day.*

*May I live this day with the dispositions
of heart that reflect the values of Jesus:*

*love, truth, compassion, mercy,
justice and kindness.*

*When decisions need to be made,
help me to choose well.*

*When asked to walk the extra mile,
grant me generosity of heart.*

*Protect me from the false ways of the Evil One
and help me to live in your truth.*

Expand my capacity for love and joy.

*In all things, may I give you honor and glory.
Amen.*

For other prayers that might be helpful to you, see my *Treasury of Prayers* on our parish website. If you think these prayers might be helpful to others, please tell them.

Why does the Church baptize infants? (C 1250-1252)

In the very early days of Christianity, only adults were normally baptized. The practice of infant baptism developed spontaneously in the early Church, and adults who had adopted the Christian way of life wanted the

same for their children. There is explicit testimony that infant baptism took place in the second century. It is possible that it occurred earlier when whole households received baptism (Acts 16:15). In 215 AD, the writer Hippolytus stated: *“When they come to the water, let the water be pure and flowing. And they shall put off their clothes. And they shall baptize the little children first. And if they can answer for themselves, let them answer. But if they cannot, let their parents answer or someone from their family.”*

But shouldn't the person being baptized have explicit faith in Jesus and have repented of sin? Infant baptism reminds us that we cannot “earn” or “merit” salvation, even through our faith. The *Catechism* states: *“The sheer gratuitousness of the grace of salvation is particularly manifest in infant baptism”* (C1250). At the baptism of an infant, faith is supplied by the parents, godparents and the community. It is a bit like the healing of the paralytic in the Gospel. It seems that this poor wounded man did not have faith to be healed yet. Jesus healed him because of the obvious faith of his friends. *“Seeing their faith...Jesus healed him”* (Mk 2:1-7). Needless to say, in the case of infant baptism, the assumption is that the child will receive post-baptismal catechesis and be led to come to know and practice the ways of Jesus and his Church. The Church also teaches that the baptism of an infant may be postponed if there is not a “well-founded hope” that the child will be raised in the Catholic faith (United States Catholic Catechism for Adults).

Quotes to ponder

It seems that God continually chooses the most unqualified to do his work, to bear his glory.
- Madelene L'Engle

The power to question is the basis of all human progress.
- Indira Gandhi

Always read something that will make you look good if you die in the middle of it.
- P.J. O'Rourke

If God can work through me, he can work through anyone.
- Francis of Assisi

People seldom do what they believe in. They do what is convenient, then repent.
- Bob Dylan

Have a blessed week,

Le Saran