

FROM THE PASTOR'S



Epiphany of the Lord January 4, 2009 B

A LOVE IMPOSSIBLE TO CONCEAL

The following reflection on the feast of the Epiphany was written by Robert Morneau, auxiliary bishop of the Diocese of Greenbay. Bishop Morneau almost loves the Packers as much as he loves God. He writes:

The feast of the Epiphany is all about God's light, love and life. It is in Jesus, the light of the world, that we are empowered to see with the eyes of faith. It is in Jesus, the beloved of the Father, that the extravagance of divine love is made manifest. And it is in Jesus, through whom all life and holiness comes, that we are invited to participate in the life of grace.

The Magi experienced the darkness of human existence. They were on a journey, not knowing exactly where they were going or what they were seeking. But a star guided them; a light in the darkness filled their souls with hope. They ventured on and eventually were given a revelation, a manifestation, an epiphany. In the Christ Child, the Magi came to new knowledge and wisdom.

In Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice, one of the characters, Portia by name, is walking in the dead of night with her servant girl. Off in the distance a small candle is burning in Portia's window and she comments to her maid:

"That light we see is burning in my hall.

How far that little candle throws his beams!

So shines a good deed in a naughty world."

Our world is very naughty with its wars, incivility, and hatreds. Jesus came to bring us light and knowledge so that we might see what really matters.

Herod attempted to deceive the Magi. Instead of love, hatred filled his heart and Herod would kill anyone who threatened his power. Little did he know that in Jesus the love of God was being made visible. Through the mystery of the Incarnation and Nativity, love broke into our world in a whole new way. This is the love that conquers hatred and fear.

St. Paul tells us that God's love is not limited to one particular people. Divine love is universal and

inclusive. All are heirs of God's promise of salvation. In Jesus that salvation and love is revealed in history. As the poet Anne Sexton says:

"Love and a cough cannot be concealed.

Even a small cough. Even a small love."

God's love is not small and it is impossible to conceal it.

A third Epiphany word: life! The Magi knelt before new life, the infant Jesus. Although death was in the air through the presence of Herod, life was stronger than death. This child would one day give his life in a supreme sacrifice but that is not the end of the story. Life in Jesus means resurrection. The sting of death has been removed and we are bound for glory, the glory of the risen life.

The opening prayer on this Feast of the Epiphany captures well the three epiphany words that shape our Christian life. We pray as a Church:

*"Father of light, unchanging God,
today you reveal to people of faith
the resplendent fact of the Word made flesh.
Your light is strong, your love is near;
draw us beyond the limits, which this world
imposes,
to the life where your Spirit makes all life complete.
We ask this through Christ our Lord."*

Jay Cormier writes the following reflection titled:

THE FACE OF GOD

High in the Andes Mountains, on the banks of a deep pond, stood a little village. Many, many years before, opposite the pond, a villager had carved the face of their god, a face of extreme beauty, a face of greatness and serenity, a face of love and strength. The villagers believed that one day their god would come and live in their midst. Centuries passed, but their god did not appear. The villagers prayed to the god of stone, but it remained stone and statue, distant and dead.

Then, one day, a child was born in the village. Even as an infant, the beauty of the ancient face captivated

him. He crawled to the brink of the abyss and looked and looked and looked. When he was old enough, he walked to the stone, spending hours looking at it. And as he studied the face, taking in all its beauty and greatness, the love and strength that poured from it filled his spirit, and his own face began to change.

Then one day, the villagers saw him passing along the village's main road and saw that the expression they had so loved in the carving of their god was now on the face of the young man.

The miracle had happened; their god was in their midst.

In the Epiphany event, God's grace is made manifest in the person of Jesus; the distance between God and humanity disappears in the birth of the child; the remote God of the universe becomes real and approachable in the face and voice and touch of Jesus. In Christ, God is in our midst—and in Christ, we can become the presence of God for others. May all that we hold, may all that we touch, may all that we are, realize the true miracle of the Incarnation - that we and our world are holy and sacred in the sight of God, our Father and Creator.

The rich diversity of our country reflects the rich diversity and universality of our church.

Each year thousands of people from every race and background enter our country and become citizens—become our brothers and sisters. In a real sense it is this embrace of all peoples that we celebrate on this feast day. In our second reading today, St. Paul says:

“God's secret plan was revealed to me. It is no less than this: in Christ Jesus the Gentiles are now coheirs with the Jews, members of the same body and sharers of the promise through the preaching of the gospel.”

The universality of the Church is the focus of the Feast of the Epiphany. The coming of the Magi to the Christ Child signifies the entrance of the Gentiles into the community of God's chosen people. At first the word “universal” seems to make the Church remote and distant. But if we take a second look, we see that the universality of the Church touches our lives in close quarters and nearby.

In a negative way, it prevents us from becoming exclusive and possessive. Having been members of the Church for so long, we tend to consider it an elite society and as something belonging to us. We can become so familiar and comfortable with the Church that we resent any intrusion by new members who

might upset the status quo. This is especially true if they speak a different language, have a different color and live by different customs.

We need to be reminded that all peoples—regardless of how much different they are from us—are called to be coheirs with us. Otherwise we become selfish and insecure about those with whom we live, work and worship. Otherwise, we become narrow-minded and feel threatened by anyone who wants to belong to our group.

In a positive way, universality makes us humble and grateful. Once we remember that we, too, entered the Church at some time like the Magi—as strangers and foreigners - we can't help but realize that our membership is a gift and that we are only guests.

So it shouldn't matter whether we're black or white, Polish or Irish, Cuban or Mexican, Filipino or Vietnamese—we are all members of the same body of Christ. It shouldn't make any difference whether we're rich or poor, educated or uneducated, old or young—we are all fellow travelers and sharers of the same promise.

Because we belong to a universal Church, we can risk reaching out to come to each other. Because we are called to the same faith, we can support one another as we follow a star and a dream in search of Christ.

A big challenge for us as citizens (or non-citizens) of this country is to learn to live with people of all kinds of backgrounds, beliefs and languages. As a church family, this is also a challenge. Every Sunday in church, we sit with people with a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds and with people with very different political convictions. Also, we sit with people who may strongly embrace some beliefs of our Church and not embrace some others. But what we all have in common is that we are children of God and all are present around the same Table to listen to the Word of God and receive his Body and Blood.

Have a blessed week,

