

Epiphany

1/2/2022

THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE INDIFFERENT

In 1966 there was a classic spaghetti western called, *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, which to be honest, I haven't seen.

We celebrate today the great feast of the Epiphany. The word epiphany, means a manifestation, a showing forth. Here it's a showing forth to the gentiles, to the foreigners, that they also were to share in the Kingdom of God. Some would accept it. Others would not but they all would be invited. That was a message for the Jewish people to learn and it can be a lesson for us to learn: to realize that the foreigner, the outsider, those who are different from us, are all invited to share in the new life Christ offers.

The Epiphany is a very catholic celebration, catholic in the literal sense of the word. The Greek word, *catolicos* means universal. The message of Christ is to be shared with all people. In the Book of Revelation there's a beautiful line about heaven involving people *from every tribe and tongue, people and nation*. The Epiphany calls us to look upon others, especially those who are different from us, as brothers and sisters or at least, as potential brothers and sisters in Christ. The Epiphany calls us beyond our fears of what is different, of those who are different and to see them as those with whom we share or may share our faith in Christ.

In this one parish, over 30 different countries from around the world are represented, and that starts to reveal the universality of the Church or as we just sang in the responsorial psalm, *All the nations on earth will adore you Lord*. On the cross, Jesus stretched out his arms to embrace the whole world and the Church as his body, is to continue that reach.

The Magi come at the beginning of Matthew's Gospel and at its conclusion, after his resurrection, Jesus will tell the apostles to go out and teach all nations, not just some nations, but all nations; to baptize them, to bring them into the family of God. What the gospel describes in a story St. Paul sums up neatly in the second reading: *the Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel*.

While not the good, the bad and the ugly, the story of the Epiphany could be called *the good, the bad and the indifferent*. The way these three groups react to the infant Jesus are the way people will react to the adult Jesus.

In the Magi, we find the good. They possessed a holy restlessness. They travel by the light of a star. They are Gentiles, foreigners, not the chosen people but they come to adore. They come to give gifts. They are attentive to what is happening around them. They seek not the newborn king of their own people but of the Jews. They have a perspective that reaches beyond their own immediate world and that alone has a lot to teach us. Their hearts are awake. Jesus would say, *Seek and you will find*. They seek, they find and they rejoice. Joy is to be found in Christ. The first expression of joy in St. Matthew's gospel is with the Magi. But they don't stop at rejoicing. It says that they prostrated themselves, they threw themselves down before him. They worship him.

Then there's the bad. Herod is greatly disturbed. He seeks to destroy the child. Just as there were those who sought to destroy the adult Jesus, so too, there were those who sought to destroy the infant Jesus. Herod's heart is paralyzed by fear and paranoia. Fear has taken so strong a hold of him that it leads him to violence. After sin, the most destructive thing in life is fear. People react with violence when they are afraid. People burn crosses on the front yard of other people because they are afraid. Fear leads to violence even towards the unborn and other vulnerable people as well.

There are Herods who continue to be at work in the world today. Now there's physical violence and there's also verbal violence. We call people names, say bad things and gossip when we're afraid. Herod is an extreme example of the evil we have to face within our own lives.

Finally there's the indifferent. There are those who are neither hot nor cold but who just don't care. Their hearts are neither awake nor paralyzed, their hearts are asleep. The scribes, those who knew the scriptures, explained matters to Herod but they don't do anything else. This is the fulfillment of everything to them but nothing seemed to change for them. They showed no excitement at the fulfillment. They didn't go to see the infant Christ. Perhaps they realized something: God disturbs our comfortable existence and they don't want to deal with that. Jesus' kingship goes hand in hand with his passion. To follow Jesus is in one way or another to share in his passion. Maybe they just didn't want to be bothered.

Like them we can face the danger, perhaps even the demon of indifference. Of not really caring that much. Of certainly not being all that bad but also of certainly not being all that good. It's an attitude that leads to minimalism, doing the least amount possible and doing so out of fear or maybe a sense of obligation rather than out of love. C.S. Lewis remarked that, *The safest road to Hell is the gradual one.* Perhaps indifference is just as dangerous to the faith as evil, or rather, indifference can be a very subtle form of evil. It can involve simply going through the motions, of perhaps a cultural faith or a hit or miss faith but not a life of intentional faith.

At one time or another, understandably, we too can be resistant or at least reluctant to accept the challenges of intentional faith but that's a challenge we're called to face not by ourselves but with God's grace and the encouragement of one another. It's also an adventure.

The Magi worship, they throw themselves down before Jesus. What they did at Bethlehem, we do at every Mass. We adore the same Christ as they did. *O Come Let Us Adore Him* describes what we are called to do all year long and not just at Christmas. And there's another way we do that: Eucharistic Adoration. This may be simply coming before Jesus present in the tabernacle or spending time before the exposed Blessed Sacrament, in the adoration chapel or at times, here at church. In adoration, we spend time in silence before Jesus pouring out our hearts before him, allowing him to speak to us in the echoes of our heart. Adoration is a time of refreshment for the soul, mind and even the body.

True worship leads us out of ourselves so that we become more generous. If we don't worship what is greater than us, we get bogged down in all that is around us. The One whom the magi worship is small, weak and helpless. God can reveal himself in ways we do not expect. Prayer and adoration help make us more aware of his presence.

This Epiphany and this year, may we avoid both the bad of outright evil and the subtle evil of indifference. Let us ask for the grace to embrace the good and to let ourselves be inconvenienced by God's love. Let us pray for a holy restlessness that finds its satisfaction in the One whom the Magi adored and the One we continue to adore.