

Epiphany of the Lord

I watched the film, “The Two Popes” during the week. I found it a very beautiful film that captures what might have happened if Cardinal Bergoglio had come to Rome to ask Pope Benedict if he could retire as the Archbishop of Buonos Aires. We are told at the beginning that the film was inspired by real events. Those real events are woven in and out of the film like threads of a wonderful tapestry. It might help to look at today’s gospel as a kind of tapestry. It is a tapestry that is made up of many colourful threads where the real events of the birth of Jesus are woven into a story from which we can learn much about who Jesus is for us and for all in our world.

As people have looked at that tapestry over the centuries they have retold the story that they see there. In its retelling in word and song the story has grown beyond what Matthew has written for us. The Magi or wise men have become three kings. We even know their names. We can understand some of the ways in which the story has grown by looking at the threads that Matthew himself has used to create it. Some of those threads are in today’s reading from The Prophet Isaiah and from the psalm that we prayed in response to that reading. It is from them that we can take other

threads that might enlarge the picture that Matthew presents to us.

I think that is a wonderful thing for us to do, because it allows us to put ourselves into the picture. We are told first that, “some wise men came to Jerusalem from the east” asking the question: ‘Where is the infant king of the Jews?’ Matthew doesn’t tell us how many there were so let’s include ourselves among their number. Let’s think of ourselves as being questioning people, people who want to grow in our faith. We too ask the question, “Where is the King of the Jews?” We want to know how to find Jesus in our lives and in the lives of those we love.

The magi saw signs of God’s presence in the stars. You could say that they were faith filled scientists. They used their natural learning to open the door to what God may want to reveal to them. Are we like that? Do we believe that we can find God by using well the gifts and talents that God has given to us? Do we look for God’s presence in the world that God has created? Are we filled with delight when we see signs of God’s goodness and beauty?

Three times in our gospel we read the word “homage”. It is a word that we do not use very much now but I

think we know what it means. It has something to do with truly knowing who God is for us and then living our lives in the truth of the relationship that God chooses to have with us. It has something to do with trying to be fully open to God's love for us and the way that God leads us.

"The Two Popes" explores the ways that both Pope Benedict and Cardinal Bergolio were open to the way that God was leading them. God was using each of them to help them hear what God wanted to say to them. There is a wonderful exchange about the difference between changing and compromising. If we are to keep growing as people of faith we need the help of others to discover where Jesus is in our world today. That will mean that we need to change. The scriptures point us in the right direction, but we need holy people who know Jesus well to lead us there.

And when we choose to do something to deepen our faith in the Lord, then God seems to send the star that guides our way. "And there in front of them was the star they had seen rising; it went forward and halted over the place where the child was." And what joy it is to be lead to a deeper understanding of who Jesus is for us. "The sight of the star filled them with delight, and going into the house they saw the child with his

mother Mary, and falling to their knees they did him homage."

When we find ourselves in the presence of the one who made us and gifted us with all that we have, we cannot help but give those gifts back to the Lord of life. "Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh." Many of us have trouble recognising the gifts that we might have. We all suffer from comparing ourselves with others who seem to be more gifted than ourselves. But perhaps the secret is not to think of our gifts as the things that we do. The greatest gift that we can offer to others is ourselves: our time, our attention, our faith, our love. When we offer these gifts to our spouse, our children or our grandchildren then we are sharing the gifts that God has given to us.

When the magi had found Jesus and offered their gifts to him that was not the end of their journey "But they were warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, and returned to their own country by a different way." When we have discovered who Jesus is for us and with his eyes begin to see how we can be gift for others then we too take a different road home. Our lives are changed. We cannot keep doing what we were doing before.