

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST: Today, we celebrate the Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord...and next Sunday is the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord by John the Baptist. With these two feasts, we conclude the liturgical season of Christmas. All of us, to one degree or another, have taken part in the celebration of Christmas...some with a happy busyness, others more quietly and thoughtfully, and still others, who remember past Christmases with their families, some now deceased...well, they celebrate this Christmas season perhaps with a touch of sadness. But still, it did us all some good, I think, because in these days devoted to children, and especially to the Child of Bethlehem, our hearts have been a little more responsive to the things that lie beyond mere routine.

The Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord means two things to me:

First and most obviously, it's the feast that introduces the anointed Savior to ALL people and to ALL nations. If we put the feasts of Christmas and Epiphany side by side to compare them, we might say

that, through the shepherds at Christmas, God gave the Jewish nation the privilege and first opportunity to welcome the Savior, since it was the Jews whom God had prepared to receive him after all. And then, not long after, God gave ALL nations the chance to welcome and accept him through the magi, since Jesus came for ALL people, not just for one nation.

Secondly, the Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord also signifies the journey of those who seek God. This isn't as clearly stated in the Christmas feast as it is here. Not only has God come to US, but WE are now in the picture. In other words, we go to him who has come to us. The three magi point out this aspect of the feast since THEY were men who found God because they SOUGHT after him.

When we read about the magi, we're really reading our own history...or, at least, it should be our history. Like the magi, we're all pilgrims on a journey. This existence we have here on earth isn't a permanent home

for us. Once we're born, we're set on a journey that goes on and on, and never again returns to the same place. Our journey moves through childhood, through youthful strength, and through the maturity of age. It travels through happy times and sad ones, through innocence and sin, through love and delusion.

It's interesting how our personal journey approximates the larger movements of salvation history...such as, for instance, the forty-year journey of the Jews toward the Promised Land after the Egyptian exile. By no stretch of the imagination could that journey have taken so long unless there was some reason for the delay. It's obvious that God took that time to fashion a tribe of men, women and children into a people who moved, lived, and breathed with the same one purpose. And that takes time...hence the reason for forty years. They needed to be united and of one mind and purpose before they tackled entrance into a new land already occupied with native inhabitants; and they needed to be of

one heart with the God who was leading them into difficulty but also into glory.

Well, our journey is the same as theirs. We, too, are heading for a promised land. We, too, must go through the purifying and unifying heat of the desert we call life. We, too, must learn to move, live and breathe with the same one purpose...which is to accept Jesus as our Lord and Messiah, and to live the life he expects of us, and to join him one day in heaven. So, it's not an aimless journey. We're not like a comet that travels through the atmosphere heading nowhere in particular. We travel by the light of God's Incarnate Word to a destination of unspeakable joy.

God is the goal of our pilgrimage, and the way to him often seems all too far and all too hard. But to those with the courage to seek him, like the magi, God has promised to let himself be found...eye to eye, heart to heart, just as the magi found him.

The magi are a symbol of what WE ought to be...determined, loving, courageous people, who want more out of life than this life alone. So many today don't see beyond their spiritual noses. They pursue this world's pleasures and compensations as if that's all there is to life. Whatever feels good, or looks good, is journey's end for them. They're not into waiting, suffering, or enduring for a better goal...unlike the magi. The magi suffered the hardship of a long and arduous journey, braved the machinations of a wily, brutal king, overcame the astounding indifference of that king's experts...all to see and worship a baby whom they felt held promise for the world.

We have more knowledge about God's plan today than did those three wise men. Yet, are we as single-minded as they were in OUR search for God? The magi are our example. Let us pray in this Mass to UNDERSTAND this in our hearts and to follow their example.