

The Feast of the Epiphany

Dear Friends,

This feast is commonly known as the feast of the Three Kings. An interesting observation is the scriptural text says nothing about the number three. It makes no mention that they are kings nor anything about their racial makeup. These are all additions of various cultural expressions developed over the centuries.

Perhaps these additions have helped us understand the Gospel message of the feast which is that all peoples are invited to the heavenly banquet.

The history of the process in which Christ's message has been passed on over the centuries has always been deeply ingrained in cultural and folkloric expressions. Often, additions have been enlightening and liberating to the basic message of salvation. On the other hand, the message has been deeply distorted with the overlay of pietistic exaggerations and even contradictions rooted in national and cultural prejudices.

One of the major hopes of Vatican II was to get us back to the central Gospel message. One of the most important developments of that holy gathering occurred a decade later when Pope Paul VI gave us one of the all time great papal documents. It was on the topic of Evangelization.

Paul VI pointed out that the message of the Gospel is never free of cultural expressions but that we have to work to always go beyond any particular cultural, national or racial expression that limits the Gospel.

Whether it is the St. Patrick's Day Parade or the Bud Billiken Parade, the celebration of the Virgin of Guadalupe or the Cristo Negro of Esquipulas, they all have a pull to limit the Gospel to one group or nation. Today's feast of the Epiphany calls us beyond so we include everyone. This is no small challenge, no easy task.

But the Magi tell us that all are invited to the feast. The shepherds reminded us of the Gospel preference for the poor. The Magi teach us that there are no foreigners at the crib. All are welcome!

The Epiphany unveils the surprise of God's love. The Epiphany tells us of God's gift of Jesus is for all the world, for all people. God's grace reaches out to all, transcending the limits of all human labels of religion and race, ideology and division, wealth and poverty. The Epiphany tells us there are no restrictions to God's hospitality. We need only accept the invitation!