

Epiphany “Following Stars”

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In preparation for today’s homily, I did a little research. I was curious about whose twitter accounts have the most followers. I was almost certain that President Trump would have been at the top of the list given how often he “tweets”, however it turns out he wasn’t even close. It seems that the opinions of Katy Perry and Justin Bieber are far more influential. Now, please understand, I don’t follow Twitter. I barely know how to Facebook. Those who “friend” me usually have to wait several months or even years before anything changes on my page. I finally figured out how to make a website to post my homilies, but that is the limit of my technical savvy. Truth is: I am not very good at this whole social media thing.

I was interested in the Twitter rankings because, I wondered how far down the list I had to go before I could find someone that I might actually be interested in following. I was shocked to discover Pope Francis didn’t even make the top 100. Please know I have nothing against other Twitter stars, it is just that, come on, we are talking about the Pope here. Admittedly, tweets along the lines of “Go to Church, Say your Prayers, Be Generous to the Poor” aren’t as entertaining as perhaps as what Justin Bieber, Lady Gaga or President Trump might tweet. This whole Twitter phenomenon is very strange to me.

You see, it is amazing to me how society is wrapped up in star worship, isn’t it? Now I have nothing against celebrities, however, have you thought about how our society is preoccupied with all kinds of star worship, aren’t we? Star worship. People following stars, so many people seeking something from other people they worship, admire or adore.

And so this weekend, we celebrate the journey of three Magi who were also following a star. We sing the song, “We three Kings of Orient are”. In truth, as you have probably learned from me by now, they weren’t kings. It would probably be more accurate to sing, “We three priests of orient are”, because that is what they were. They were astrologers, pagan priests, following the star, seeking a savior. Furthermore, we don’t know if there were three of them, could have been more. We simply infer the number of Magi from the number of gifts they brought. The names our tradition has given to them are Caspar, Melchior and Balthazar. The meaning of the Magi’s presence before Jesus is the universality of God’s saving plan. You see, the Gospel of Matthew wants to make it clear to us: Jesus wasn’t born to save only Israel. Jesus was born to save the whole world.

Of course, the three gifts the Magi bring are symbolic. Gold represents the fact that Jesus is royalty, the new King David so to speak. Frankincense represents Jesus’ divinity. Incense would be something you would encounter in holy places, temples, etc. Myrrh was used for funeral purposes, so the gift can foreshadow Jesus’ passion, death and resurrection. The Magi’s presence in the Gospel also suggests a fourth gift: the gift of

our self! This is a gift far more precious to Jesus than gold, frankincense or myrrh. You see, from Jesus' perspective, we are the stars worth following. More on that in a moment.

What I find interesting, however, is that the Magi's reverence for the star was always a means to an end. What do I mean by that? The star's purpose was always to lead them someplace, to lead the Magi to the Christ child. If you ask yourself what is the difference between the lives of the saints and some of the stars we see on Twitter, the difference is this: the saints are stars that actually lead us someplace. Don't they? The saints lead heroic and virtuous lives, accomplish great deeds at times, God works miracles through them, and many of them died in defense of what we believe. They all, however, are stars that lead us someplace. If we become inspired by their lives, learn to live as they lived, the saints are stars that lead us to Jesus. If you need a star to follow, how about Mother Teresa, Maximilian Kolbe, John Paul II, or Elizabeth Ann Seton? They will lead you someplace. How about a mother, father, grandparent or a wise friend, they will lead you someplace too. Does this make sense to you?

Much of the star worship I see in society is different. There are a lot of people who worship stars that do not lead us to Christ. In fact there are stars that lead people to nowhere. Or worse, there are false stars that if you follow them, they will ultimately lead you to destruction. And I am not just talking about people. I am also talking about false stars like materialism, egotism, self-pity, the list goes on. So the question becomes who or what are the stars we follow? Will they lead us to Christ or into a black hole? This could be an interesting question when we consider the politics we support, the websites we follow, the circle of friends we keep, the lifestyle we lead, etc. An interesting question for our young people, what kind of person do you want to be like when you reach adulthood? A good indicator is the answer to the question: What stars do you follow?

You see, my friends, on a clear, brisk night, you can look up into the heavens and see millions, if not billions, of stars up there. On Earth, perhaps there are millions of stars that can be followed as well. Some of these stars lead our souls to Jesus and to heaven. Some of these stars lead us to nowhere. Some are false stars that can lead us to hell if we let them. As astrologers, the Magi were pagan priests who knew the stars very well. Through the grace of Almighty God, they were able to choose the right star, strip themselves of their pagan beliefs, and kneel down before the baby Jesus, giving Jesus the gift of themselves.

When this happened, an interesting reversal happened. The Magi discovered that, from God's perspective, we are the stars he wants to follow. We are the stars he wants to follow. God passionately follows every moment of our lives. This is why God became human and dwelt among us in the person of Jesus. And Jesus wants to be as close to us as food and drink. That is what the Eucharist is all about. From God's perspective, we are souls not only worth following, but souls worth entering, souls worth saving, even worth dying for. That is how much God love you. Now how's that for a Tweet?

Of course, Pope Francis is much better at this Twitter thing than I am. Here are some recent ones. Pope Francis tweeted recently, “In the simplicity of the nativity scene we encounter and contemplate the tenderness of God which reveals itself in the Baby Jesus.” That is really profound, isn’t it? The pope also gave good advice when he tweeted, “Let us nurture the seeds of peace as they grow and let us transform our cities into workshops of peace.” Wouldn’t it be great if the world followed that advice? And more to the point of my homily today, the Pope tweeted, “Go out to meet Jesus, spend time with Him in prayer, and entrust your whole life to His merciful love.” Amen to that.

And so, my friends, as we celebrate Epiphany, the Gospel asks us to consider what star do we follow as we make our pilgrim journey through life? What star do we follow? And, as we all know, there are millions of stars to pick from. The Gospel today gives us a very strong suggestion: pick a good one. Pick a star that leads you someplace. Pick a star that leads you to Jesus.