

EPIPHANY 2023

ARISE, SHINE FOR YOUR LIGHT HAS COME

“*Arise, shine out...for your light has come, the glory of the Lord is rising on you.*” So said Isaiah.

“*You have probably heard how I have been entrusted by God with the grace he meant for you...*” writes Paul with this extraordinary promise.

It is with these deeply encouraging words that we enter the mystery of this Epiphany celebration. The Opening prayer made our desire known: *Lead us, who know you now by faith, to your presence, where we may see your glory face to face.* When was the very last time you were personally aware of the glory of the Lord being upon you? Where, in the recent past, have you experienced the grace, He meant you to have? If this mystery of Jesus is truly about a ‘manifestation’ where and in what way has He manifested Himself to you? We can celebrate these events, or rather mark them like any other anniversary that comes and goes but what real effect do they have in our daily life. How do these mysteries truly become part of our own mystery?

Walking into Kalighat for the first time was an experience I shall never forget. The heat, the dim light and the strong smell of decaying flesh stayed with me – indeed I can smell it now. Kalighat is the home for the dying destitute in Calcutta. It was the very first place that Mother Teresa opened in 1952 giving it the name: Nirmal Hriday- ‘*Home of the Pure Heart*’ it is a manifestation of the glory of the Lord and an experience of grace. This was not however my first thoughts. My first thought was how do I stop myself being sick from the terrible smell of rotting flesh, human waste, and disinfectant. I was being shown round by Sr Fredrick, now 104, who was Assistant Superior to Mother Teresa for 34 years. Hoping that the visit would soon come to an end I was then asked to celebrate Mass with the sisters and patients. “Of course, Father will”, said Sr Fredrick with a disarming smile!

Putting on the vestments I caught sight of the prayer that is found in every sacristy of the Missionaries of Charity throughout the world: *Remember O Priest to celebrate this Mass as if it were your first Mass, as if it were your only Mass as if it were your last Mass.* The heat and smell and the growing sense of nausea certainly had the feeling that this could well be my last Mass. But as the Mass progressed an amazing sense of the presence of God invaded this sacred space and as I elevated the Host and said ‘*This is my body*’ – the manifestation occurred – looking out at this wounded and suffering group of God’s people, the heat seemed less oppressive and the smell disappeared, they were indeed His body. Giving communion weaving

among the beds, blessing those who were not catholic was a moment of sheer grace, the glory of the Lord really had descended upon us.

The Epiphany can easily become a time when we play those futile religious games with theories about whether they were kings, or wise men, were they fable or part of the reality of history. We get lost in the richness of the symbolic gifts and lose sight of the invitation to enter this mystery here and now, to see it played out in the quality and poverty of our lives. The most important journey that these magi made was not the distance they travelled from point A to point B nor the possible exotic location from which they started their journey, interesting as this may be, what is of deeper significance is where they arrived, who they encountered and the profound effect that this meeting had upon the rest of their life. The real focus today is on their inner journey, a movement that changed their perceptions of what they thought God was like and who they thought themselves to be in the light of this truth.

For those of us who believe and pray, these visitors from the East who, guided by the star, hungry for the truth made their way to Bethlehem, these men are only the beginning of a great procession which winds throughout history. The first to visit Jesus – the light of the World were poor shepherds -those who were in most need of hope. These Magi embody all people of every country who desire to understand the meaning of life – a meaning that lies beyond their invention – they set out on a road that will lead to the child of Bethlehem. Once they offer him adoration, they fall to worship. It is simply not true that all roads lead to Rome, from the very beginning men and women of every place, of every continent, of all the different cultures, mentalities, and lifestyles, have been on the way to Christ. All roads lead to HIM.

"Going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him" (Mt 2: 11), this is not a distant story that took place long ago. It is where are now. Here in this celebration of Mass, in the Word we have been anointed with and the sacred host and precious blood we will receive, he is present before us and in our midst. As at that time, so now he is mysteriously veiled in a sacred silence; as at that time, it is here that the true face of God is revealed. For us he became a grain of wheat that falls on the ground and dies and bears fruit until the end of the world (cf. Jn 12: 24). The Epiphany is ever new and ever real.

In 2005 Pope Benedict spoke beautifully at World Youth Day in Cologne about this very journey of the Magi he said:

"Going into the house (over which the star had halted), they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him" (Mt 2: 11). Outwardly, their journey was now over. They had reached their goal.

But at this point a new journey began for them, an inner pilgrimage which changed their whole lives. Their mental picture of the infant King they were expecting to find must have been very different...The new King, to whom they now paid homage, was quite unlike what

they were expecting. In this way they had to learn that God is not as we usually imagine him to be. This was where their inner journey began. It started at the very moment when they knelt down before this child and recognized him as the promised King. But they still had to assimilate these joyful gestures internally.

They had to change their ideas about power, about God and about man, and in so doing, they also had to change themselves.

The Word of God today is a clarion call to mission. First to live authentically within ourselves the light and grace that has been given – the epiphany that we have experienced. Then to become an epiphany. We are a manifestation of God’s presence in our world today. Much of the western world, which was once rooted in Christian faith has by degree consciously turned its back on the light of the world and decided that it has no need of Christ. We live in apostolic times. If our brothers and sisters are to encounter Christ, they will do so through the transparent lives of faith that we choose to live.

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Today is our chance to experience this amazing epiphany of light and grace. Today is our chance to take this light and grace to others.

Abbot Robert Igo, OSB

6 January 2023