

Epiphany of the Lord (C): We give because we are richly blessed

Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-2,7-8,10-11,12-13; Ephesian 3:2-3a,5-6; Matthew 2:1-12

Dear family and friends of CCST,

It's the Epiphany of the Lord!

The feast of the Epiphany of the Lord recalls and celebrates when Jesus as a baby first reveals or manifests himself to the public beyond Mary and Joseph. Together with this celebration, we re-live and ponder our capacity to respond to God's gift of himself and ability to participate in manifesting his glory to the world.

Epiphany means to manifest or reveal. It is a compound of two Greek words, "epi and phaino." The more important of the two words is the second word which means to show or to appear. The first word, "epi" is a typical Greek prefix that means forth, ahead, forward. When we put the two words together, we have "epiphaino," which means to show forth, manifest, reveal, in some instances to shine or glow. So, on this feast day, we remember and re-live the moment in time when Jesus manifests himself to the world.

But there is more to the feast than Jesus' first public appearance. It is the story of the Magi from the East who may represent the peoples of the world searching for meaning and purpose, looking for answers to the riddles of life, or longing to find happiness. What attracts our attention about the Magi or Wisemen is that: they risked leaving their country; they humbly followed the mysterious star, they adored the child born in a manger, offered gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh; and their lives were never the same after their encounter with the child Jesus.

Their story could also be our story, and it tells us how we ought to respond to God's manifestation of his saving grace in our lives.

On Christmas Day, we focus on what God has given us, the gift of his Son, Jesus, the Immanuel. We recognized that God is the generous gift-giver, and we are all receivers. But on the feast of the Epiphany, the focus is on us, as gift-givers. It follows Christmas in chronology and significance as if to say that we can give because we have so richly received.

Like the wise men, our whole life is a journey of responses to God's gifts in our lives. Giving something to others makes our response concrete, and the manner of our response manifests how our encounter of God's grace renews us. When goodness comes out from within us and is given to others, it doesn't cause empty space but gives birth to contentment and joy. It's how God designs the virtue of giving. I never heard individuals or families become poor or broke because they give generously. What I knew was the opposite. God blessed those generous givers. Listen to what St. Paul said in his second letter to the Corinthians 9:6-8, "Consider this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each must do as already determined, without sadness or compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. Moreover, God is able to make every grace abundant for you, so that in all things, always having all you need, you may have an abundance for every good work."

Epiphany is the feast of the gift-givers of all kinds and for all times.

Yes, it is the feast of parents, children, friends, classmates, and lovers who exchange gifts during the Christmas season. But it goes beyond the Christmas season. It is the feast of all who work hard to make their families happy. It is the feast of couples who struggle daily to make their marriages more meaningful. It is the feast of those who find time to share their time and talent with the church or civic

organizations. It is the feast of people who devote their lives to pray for others, especially those sick and struggling in life. It is the feast of those who gave their lives to spread the good news of the Gospel or offer their services to help others: the refugees, victims of physical abuse, and all forms of human tragedies. It is the feast of our men and women in uniform who gave their lives to preserve peace, order, and freedom in our country. It is the feast of children who learn to think of other poor children to help from a very young age. It is the feast of the young sons and daughters who open up themselves to serve the poor and less fortunate. It is the feast of those who willingly embraced the pains of cancer or old age and tried to stay human through it all. It is the feast of those who try to control their tempers for the sake of their loved ones. It is the feast of the neighbor who consciously refrains from gossip and tries to put in a good word for everyone. It is the feast of someone who gave a dollar or quarter to a homeless person without hesitation. It is the feast of everyone and anyone who has something to offer to the world, however small, trivial, and inconsequential.

Brothers and sisters, today is Epiphany. All Christmas presents have already been given, and this is the day on which we thank the Lord that we could give. There is no more exchange of gifts on this day, instead of a quiet reflection of the ability to give and love others. We are the wise men, you and I, all of us. We can give, and when we do, we become manifestations of God's glory -- the epiphanies of God's graciousness to the world!

Happy Epiphany! Be Epiphany!

Fr. Manny Hewe