

Reflection from the Superior General

The three magi from the East brought gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to those gathered around the new-born child in Bethlehem, Mary and Joseph among them. (Matt. 2)

However, the beautiful story of the Epiphany suggests that these same travellers from the East bring other gifts, too, both to those in Bethlehem and also to us. These other gifts of the wise men, then and now, are channels of peace and reconciliation within a very violent world. The Epiphany speaks to hearts in every age that long for peace and reconciliation in the midst of war, injustice and violence.

We are so familiar with the Christmas scene that the magi seem to fit in there very naturally. In reality, they were strangers in every way – they spoke different languages, they came from different countries and religious traditions, and they were searching in the darkness of the night to follow the light of the star. Yet

even as total strangers they were welcome to come and give their gifts. We too will work for peace in our troubled world when we welcome into our lives those who are different from us. Like Mary and Joseph before us, we are called to offer a warm welcome to those who speak strange, incomprehensible languages, who believe different creeds from ours and who are searching for light in places where we have never been. We could think of the migrants crossing into our lands, of the people around us who have almost surrendered to the darkness, or of our neighbours who may be Muslim, Hindu, Jewish or Buddhist or who are searching for “the truth” in their own way. Mary and Joseph lead us, in our age of increasingly closed borders and



narrowing perspectives, to welcome and embrace the strangers and the particular gifts they bring.

Along their way the magi encountered evil in the person of Herod, plotting violence to maintain his own position. The cries of the innocent children from the Holy Land bellow out for justice, then as now. The magi shun evil and its off-spring, which is violence. We too, along with the magi, encounter evil and violence in our broken world and need to name it for what it is, and reject it, loudly if necessary.

When the magi discover Jesus together with Mary and Joseph their hearts are filled with joy. The scene is simple and focuses on the poor, vulnerable child who is Emmanuel, “God-among-us”. Bethlehem is far from the rich, comfortable palaces of those who have ordered the census which will audit their wealth. We, too, will surely encounter the same joy in the Christ-child when we are free from any undue concerns for our “worldly” comfort and financial security. The magi call us to find our joy in living simply among those who are poor, and those who are struggling, in today’s world. Our worth is to be judged by how we respond to Christ among the prisoners, the sick, and the hungry. (Matt. 25).

The magi followed the wisdom of the dream that called them to return to their own country “by a different way”. The magi were changed by meeting Christ among the foreigners in Bethlehem, of rejecting Herod’s false promises, and of finding Christ among the poor. They were inspired to seek “a different direction”, both physically and spiritually. The story of the Epiphany challenges us to seek new directions to reach home safely, with Christ and with Mary and Joseph. We are encouraged, whether we are young or no longer young, not to be imprisoned by tired memories and old paths and always to be open to follow dreams that will truly lead us home, physically and spiritually, by new roads.

We live in a violent world, often entrenched within our own hearts. Among the gifts that the magi bring are graces that enable us to work for a conversion of heart towards the Christ child, king of peace. When we accept the gifts of the magi into our hearts, 2024 will see us journeying towards our home with God “by a different way”. Let’s celebrate this Epiphany, 2024, by welcoming at least one of the gifts of the Magi into our own hearts by practical, faith-filled action in our actual circumstances of this New Year.

A blessed New Year!

John Larsen s.m.