

St Pius & St Anthony Homily Epiphany Year C

On my ride to my parents the other day for Christmas, I pulled into their subdivision, and of course it was so summer-like warm, but I saw an interesting sight. As I was circling in a cul-de-sac, to turn around park and park across the street from my mom & dad's house, I saw what looked like a family team meeting outside a garage door driveway of one of their neighbors. It took me a moment to realize what was really going on. It was one of those mom & dad After-Santa construction sites (part of one of those 'some assembly required' toys). They were brainstorming how to put together a children's big plastic jungle gym (Santa strikes again! I know Santa gets credit for the gift. Moms/dads get so overlooked-they deserve so much credit for actually getting things put together! I hope that family got all their parts together that day! God bless all parent this time of year!

(Is that why we have Holy Family really soon after Christmas?-they surely need such a boost of grace during the holidays and break!)

Today's gospel tells us of the wise men showing up to the nativity scene. Sounds simple enough, but there is a lot going on off screen here (and some pretty dark stuff). Christmas is all happy, with the light come into world, etc, but we have to be realistic, and not forget that **the light** comes into darkness-a dark background of our fallen world. Things aren't so rosy around Bethlehem. The gospel says as much today, telling us that when the wise men showed up, Herod was 'troubled' and 'all Jerusalem with him'? There is a trail of blood leading into and out of Bethlehem (that is why I've always thought we are fascinated with red and green plants at Christmas-Green-yes a sign of growth/ life, but the red of shed blood how fragile life is right below it. The Red/Green of poinsettias, the red and green of holly, the red and green of apples on trees). Well, when the solution to sin shows up in Bethlehem-Jesus, it still doesn't always mean everything is going to be great immediately. There is some struggle/difficulty to be accepted along the way-more steps to take working it all out. So, thinking back to those parents paining over the toy assembly project in their driveway, made me think about my post-Christmas project I got pulled into day after Christmas involving superglue.

I should have known it wasn't going to turn out well! Does it ever with superglue? But you probably wonder, why did I even need superglue to begin with? Okay, here is the full confession: As I was going to my parents Christmas day, I walked by the rectory Christmas tree and thought it since it would be late when I returned, I better unplug the tree's lights. So I bent over to do that, I'm in

hurry and guess I tipped the tree off its tabletop stand. So as I raised up, the tree decides to crash down over on the ground. Not a big deal, except for all the shiny glass shaped ornaments that exploded like shooting stars on the ground! I couldn't deal with it then, so I just mourned quickly (oh no, my old dog's house ornament, or my friend's personalized painted glass orb) I kept moving saying I would pick up some superglue for a fix later.

Next episode, I got the glue to reassemble the ornaments, and I should have recognized a bad omen when the applicator top I needed to screw onto the head of tube, threaded on crooked! As I applied the first drops, it went one to ornament then one to the fingers. Okay, I slipped the tube into my jacket pocket-where it leaked. After getting it loose from my inner pocket, I realized plastic top glued itself shut. What I thought was a great idea to just cut off bottom of the tube with scissors, was fine if you don't want to use scissors ever again-they glued shut, and then as I applied the stream of glue to the next ornament piece it was way too much, so my fingerprints are eternally stamped on it. To make short story longer, it's going to make a great future tree of 'misfit ornaments' for next year. But my point is that, things weren't rosy at my Bethlehem scene at the foot of my Christmas tree.

Which brings me to today's gospel—Trouble is brewing immediately after Jesus' birth. Epiphany is a revelation of Jesus who has come to change our world, but naturally there are resistant forces to goodness's change (Named Herod!)

I like to point out that today's scene of wise men showing up in Jerusalem looking for newborn king (this infuriated Herod & scared the life out of Jerusalem) To me this is like a snapshot out of an old western movie-a showdown on Main Street. There is only room in town for one Sheriff! Jerusalem here feels like Hadleyville in the western High Noon- as the white hat and dark hat square off on main street, all the shutters start closing & people dive for cover. Herod grows angrier and more desirous to kill everyone related to this newborn threat to his throne. We will hear later of Herod hatefully murdering all the babies 2 years old & younger because King Jesus will slip through his net trap-the wise men slyly don't collude with Herod. The town knows full well Herod's brutal cruelty. And all of that is in the background. But celebrating epiphany reminds us that sacrifice is involved with following Jesus. The crib of Jesus comes connected to the cross. The shadow of Calvary is cast over Bethlehem (this celebration of Jesus' birth involves the first martyrs of faith, or whom we call the Holy Innocents who sacrifice their lives in Christ's name). We see in the background

The celebration of Jesus' birth involves the tragic death of who we call the Holy Innocents. This hinted at in today's gospel; that in the background of Christmas is the Easter (death-resurrection) story too. That the deepest fullest life with God life comes to us through death. Sacrifice brings us the greatest joy. Jesus came to be born among us so that He could die in place of us and bring us eternal birth beyond by going through this fallen world of ours with us. Jesus is born and lives among us to show us the way- to help us avoid falling into the traps of different Herods in this world. I like how we have two examples of earthly kings- The Wise Men & Herod. One leads us to new life in Christ for others and one of them pulls us back into selfish death. One of them is giving (wise men) and one is taking (Herod). One of them is open & seeking good in others, (wise men) and one is closed off to others all shut up unto himself. One of them can humbly kneel and adore someone greater than himself (wise men), and one can only proudly makes others kneel to his own self and have no love for anyone else. I think the message for us on Epiphany is that the wise men (who are powerful in their own right) lead us to the true king- Jesus who teaches us that our fullest life (John 10:10) comes through giving, through sacrifice and openness to others, seeking that something greater than ourselves, in the company of others through life given away and shared for other people. That is Christ the king's life, and light star we follow.