

## St Pius & St Anthony Epiphany Sunday Year B2

Here's a question? What is your favorite football team? High school, college or NFL? (or maybe just your favorite team whatever sport)?

As kids we did get into football, and it being Christmas time, I remember getting excited about the gift of a new NERF football (those spongy soft ones). But considering our injuries, we probably should have asked for soft, spongy shoulder pads and helmets to play with in the corner field. But again, what was your favorite sports team as a kid – and - is it still your favorite?

My favorite team as a kid was the Los Angeles Rams – my older brother was St Louis Cardinal fan. Why the Rams, for me? I know as a kid I marveled at their kicker in the mid 1970's Tom Dempsey who held at the time, the longest field goal kick of 63 yards, and he was who was born with only half a foot-no toes (and missing a right hand). *He played in his career for Saints, Eagles, Rams, Oilers and Bills.* He held the record until it was matched in 2013, and beaten in 2021 by Baltimore Ravens Justin Tucker with 66 yards. So, I admired Dempsey's resilience. But also about the Rams, I loved their colors blue and yellow and the twist horn on their helmets. But also, at the heart of it, here is why I am a Rams fan: **I am an Aries!**

But what makes us fans of certain teams and not others, everyone has a favorite? But what brought us to them?

I read an article recently (study reported on msn.com) - about the most loyal fans and their teams. I had always thought of the most loyal fan base as maybe, Green Bay Packers, Kansas City Chiefs or even Washington Commanders because of what they have been through. The article surprised me: #1 most loyal fan base was for Cincinnati Bengals! Now how did they come up with that? Their research was based on factors like the most keyword searches on several web engines, ticket sales, merchandise sales and attendance at games.

But I mention this because some of what may lead us to be the strongest fan or supporter is that you have been rooting for them from the beginning. Which brings me to today's gospel! We hear in Matthew 2:2, that the wise men say about this newborn king, "We saw his star at its rising.....". The star at its rising, means to me, that like the best of fans, they are in it with Jesus from the beginning-from his rising. I commend them for their getting in early and remaining in relationship to Jesus throughout their lives.

I think it is safe to presume their lifelong commitment to conversion and being a disciple of Christ, even after their return to their home countries. Why?

First, I find their deep commitment reflected in their proactive willingness to seek out the source of this star to begin with. Also, even with the star's guidance, it was not easy for them to end up the New Savior Kings place of birth, Bethlehem. They had to navigate through King Herod's bureaucracy, probably the hardest maze to wind through, was those counselors and attendants Herod consulted to learn the prophecies better. But also the wise men survived the sinister political manipulation games of Herod trying to squeeze information from them about Jesus' location. Perhaps many people find their deep level of commitment to lifelong discipleship to Christ from their sacrificial and extravagant gifts offered to Mary, Joseph, and Jesus Himself. All of this adds up to me to indicate that they remain disciples of this newborn King. They are forever changed by this early encounter with God become human – Emmanuel. They get in with Jesus at the beginning. That has to mean something, keeping them WITH Him forever. We all remember those that stood with us from the start.

So yes, I am holding the Wise Men up as good examples of what discipleship means. They can teach us what it means to be good disciples of Jesus.

- 1) First as good disciples, they evangelize everywhere they go. Can you imagine how many times in their travel they were asked by folks, "What are you doing in these parts?" And I am sure that they shared their faith story. "We are going to meet the King – let us tell you about the God's light." I find this in their readiness to worship and adore Jesus. They are quick to offer prayer & recognition to others about the purpose of their lives. The Magi teach us to ask ourselves, "Why do I believe this & what does it mean?"
- 2) Secondly, as good disciples, the Wise Men teach us to maintain a reverent and open disposition. Before the wise men even met Jesus, they were saying they came to do Him homage. They are ready to bow in prayer before, what they perceive as so much greater than their selves. They are open, ready to listen and understand. They are humble and realize that they are but a piece, a single part, a simple member of something greater (Member of Body of Christ, we say). Like good scientists, humble when facing their subject , their study – they're aware there is so much more to know, to experience and to value as they study Disciples should be that way too. We have so much more to learn.
- 3) Thirdly, the wise men teach us that good disciples follow-up - the journey never ends. They keep pursuing truth – the light of Jesus Christ, even when back home. Notice that their GPS – guiding OnSTAR, changed

after meeting Christ. They were led to him by a star, but afterward, God begins to speak to them more internally, through their dreams (the warning not to return to Herod- which probably saved their lives). So the Wise Men teach us to continue seeking, delving deeper into our faith experiences, praying over and discerning what God is calling us to. And being willing to share that with others. Maybe this is speculation, but since these wise men are so studious, I can't believe that they would not have secured from the Jerusalem rabbis, copies of the Hebrew scriptures regarding the Messiah, either buying or borrowing them to study further (follow-up on such Isaiah-an prophecies about the Messiah such as Isaiah 7 'Virgin with child' passage or Isaiah 11's 'the lion and lamb lie down together, all being led by the child...' verses. Also, I suspect they conversed at length with Joseph and Mary -Mary sharing with them her scriptural Magnificat Prayer, and maybe giving to them her prayer book of psalms to take home as prayer helps to them.

So, the wise men can lead us to being better disciples, if we follow their example, keeping lifelong conversion as our goal, being open and hospitable, always ready to share our walk of faith with others, in addition to maintaining a readiness to worship and adoration of God, and as we continue on seeking deeper relationship to Christ by searching His will out through our prayer and advancing study of His word and our life. The journey of faith always continues