

[Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72; Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6; Matthew 2:1-12]

I don't know how many of you have made a "pilgrimage" in your lifetime – going on a long journey to a sacred place that is important to one's belief and faith. For some it is Rome or Lourdes or the Holy Land; for others it is Graceland or the Hockey Hall of Fame in Toronto.

Back in June of 1982, only one month after my priestly ordination, I travelled to California and stayed with a college classmate and friend of mine. The visit included a tour/pilgrimage to Universal Studios in Hollywood. There I found and touched the side of one of the three DeLorean cars which were used for the movie trilogy, "Back to the Future." AND I got the autograph of Walter Koenig, who played Chekov on Star Trek. He signed a souvenir clipboard which I used to compose my homilies for the first ten years of my priesthood. This was before computers, when I had to hand-write all of my homilies! He wrote: "Wishing you the best of all worlds... And I'm sure you know which one that is!"

A pilgrimage involves both time and space. It involves traveling from one location to another, generally of some distance, usually over a long period of time. For the pilgrim, the travel time can offer an opportunity for prayer and reflection, and the distance often requires penance and pain of some kind, even if the mode of transportation is convenient. Pilgrimages have been with us for centuries, even for thousands of years. We are a "Pilgrim Church" still on the move!

Every year on the feast of the Epiphany, Polish cities get flooded with joyful Three Kings Parades. Designed as theatrical performances that recall the historical event of Jesus' birth and the visit of the Magi who worshiped him 2,000 years ago, the parades familiarize their audiences with the Gospel tradition.

The Magi come to the manger on pilgrimage as pagans. They search for truth and beauty, and they find God. This is the message of that pilgrimage: to commemorate their search and to reach all -- believers and non-believers.

The Magi, thanks to their reason, discover that something important has happened. From the very beginning, Poland's Epiphany parades commemorate God's love for every person in the world. Everyone can fit around the manger.

And show the light of faith to the world! Even you and I have a place and can fit around the manger! Today's feast of the "epiphany" or "manifestation" of God to all peoples challenges us to show the world the light of our own faith.

With the birth of Jesus Christ, a fire has been lit of love and compassion, peace and justice for all people. The Feast of the Epiphany shows us that Jesus has made the fire of faith and hope available to all people who seek it, who embrace it, who live it in their daily lives. Like any fire, that which has been entrusted to us by Jesus must be tended or else it will go out and be extinguished. If the fire is not available for everyone, then it will burn for no one.

And here is something about the Epiphany that we may not have known. Our pilgrimage works both ways in this case. We not only journey to God, but **GOD IS ON A GREAT JOURNEY TO US!**

The humility by and the great lengths which Jesus has taken to come to us, to become one like us and among us, and to show Himself to us, and the great lengths He will continue to take in His three years of public ministry which will lead to His passion, death and Resurrection.

As we see the greatness of Jesus' journey to us, as we reflect on the greatness of the journey of the Magi, what are the ways that the Holy Spirit is moving US to continue OUR great journey, in this life and the life to come? What gifts do WE bring this day to the stable and place before the Lord and King? Let us bring the gold of our material wealth and physical possessions; the incense of those Spirit-moments and God-moments of our lives; the myrrh, the funeral oils of our suffering and pain, and lay it before the Lord. How far will YOU go? Keep the flame of your faith alive as you and I continue our earthly pilgrimage with our eye fixed on Jesus... and on Heaven!
AMEN!