

SERMON 906

January 4, 2015

Epiphany Sunday

979th Week as Priest

806th Week at St Dunstan's

71st Week at Epiphany-Tallassee

MAKING THE JOURNEY



*Grace to you, and
peace, from God our
Father and the Lord
Jesus Christ. AMEN.*

'A cold coming we
had of it, Just the

worst time of the year For a
journey, and such a long journey:
The ways deep and the weather
sharp, The very dead of winter.'

So begins a famous poem by T.S.
Eliot called, "Journey of the Magi."
It's the story of the visit by the
Three Wise Men to Bethlehem, told
from their perspective. The reason I
believe that it is important to share

JOURNEY OF THE MAGI

'A cold coming we had of it,
Just the worst time of the year
For a journey, and such a long journey:
The ways deep and the weather sharp,
The very dead of winter.'
And the camels galled, sorefooted, refractory,
Lying down in the melting snow.
There were times we regretted
The summer palaces on slopes, the terraces,
And the silken girls bringing sherbet.
Then the camel men cursing and grumbling
and running away, and wanting their liquor and
women,
And the night-fires going out, and the lack of
shelters,
And the cities hostile and the towns unfriendly
And the villages dirty and charging high prices:
A hard time we had of it.
At the end we preferred to travel all night,
Sleeping in snatches,
With the voices singing in our ears, saying
That this was all folly.

Then at dawn we came down to a temperate
valley,
Wet, below the snow line, smelling of vegetation;
With a running stream and a water-mill beating
the darkness,
And three trees on the low sky,
And an old white horse galloped away in the
meadow.
Then we came to a tavern with vine-leaves over
the lintel,
Six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of
silver,
And feet kicking the empty wine-skins.
But there was no information, and so we
continued
And arriving at evening, not a moment too soon
Finding the place; it was (you might say)
satisfactory.

All this was a long time ago, I remember,
And I would do it again, but set down
This set down
This: were we led all that way for
Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly
We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth
and death,
But had thought they were different; this Birth
was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our
death.
We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
But no longer at ease here, in the old
dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods.
I should be glad of another death.

--T.S. Eliot

these words is the central nature of going on a journey as a metaphor for the Christian life, the way of faith. I believe that this life we have is nothing short of a journey to God.

Saint Bonaventure wrote of this very idea in a manner that prepares us to begin the spiritual journey ...

*Remember that simply reading the words is not enough—
You must ask God's blessing.*

*Intellectual inquiry is not enough—
You must be completely committed to the journey.*

*Going through the motions is not enough—
You must have a spirit of wonder.*

*Being a careful observer is not enough—
You must have a spirit of joy.*

God wants your devotion, not just your hard work.

God yearns for your love, not just your knowledge.

God loves your humble heart, not just your good mind.

Recognize your deep need for God to bless your journey.

Strive for God's wisdom to be mirrored in your efforts.

Open yourself to God's grace.

Give God your humble and contrite heart.

Show forth your gladness.

Let the light of wisdom shine in you.

Love God with a holy desire.

Give yourself to God

and realize that you are in God's holy, life-giving, wonderful presence.

Think of your soul as a mirror, cleaned and polished, reflecting God's glory.

When the Wise Men came from the East, they were following a star that they understood might lead them to the place where the Messiah was to be born. They were not of the House of Israel; they were intellectuals, scholars, and followers of the stars. They studied the heavens and determined that they must make this journey. They prepared as best they could, but then how can we ever know all that will befall us on such a journey? They knew there would be difficulties and hazards, but they stepped out with faith, and with a sure and certain hope. It takes courage to begin such an adventure, because we never know exactly what the future holds for us. But there is meaning and purpose in the making of the journey, and it is defined ultimately in the arrival at a place, a certain place where Christ is present. Eliot wrote of this very moment, this fullness-of-time:

and so we continued

And arriving at evening, not a moment too soon

Finding the place; it was (you might say) satisfactory.

The Feast of the Epiphany is one of the great high feast days of the Church Year. Here we recall, even relive, the arrival of the Wise Men to the place where the Child was born. They know him to be the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. They pay him homage, and they give him gifts of gold,

frankincense, and myrrh. They kneel before him and worship the Child as Emmanuel, that is, God-made-Man. And not only is he is long-awaited Messiah of the Jewish people; he is now known as the great deliverer of all the people of the earth from sin and death. Christ is made manifest, he is shown or made known, to all the world. We see God, which is the meaning of the word, 'epiphany.'

Before this moment in time, God was understood as distant, aloof, and at times arbitrary. The Jews knew God as often angry, jealous, and even violent. (I've not quite understood if that was how God was, or how the People of God saw him.)

But now, in this fullness-of-time, God has come to us in the form of a human being, actually a newborn child, defenseless and innocent, vulnerable and perfectly excellent in every way. Our epiphany is to see and understand that this is truly God's way of coming into the world, of coming into our lives. Not as warrior-king, not as angry or jealous deity, rather as one of us, yet without sin. And he, this Holy Child, who will grow up into the full stature of a man, will be Jesus of Nazareth, who is called Wonderful Counselor, Prince of Peace.

You and I could spend our whole lives on such a journey, following his star, committing ourselves, our souls and bodies, to such a task.

Our lives will never be perfect, free of mistakes and wrong turns. We will, at times, find ourselves lost and seemingly alone. But if we commit ourselves to such a way of living, and if we endure, and when we are lost we return to the Lord, we will find that we have lived a life that is truly 'worthy of Christ,' and that will be entirely satisfactory. **AMEN.**

1,225 words