

OUR LADY STAR OF THE SEA, WEYMOUTH

HOMILY FOR THE EPIPHANY 2009

The Epiphany suggests threes. Three even rhymes with Epiphany. There were three wise men and three gifts.

The feast celebrates three “mysteries”:

The adoration of the child Jesus by the wise men, which we are thinking about at this Mass;

The Baptism of Jesus, which we shall think about next week;

The Wedding Feast at Cana which does not occur in any Mass this year

I would like to think about the gifts. In our Gospel St. Matthew tells us that the wise men offered Jesus gifts and he accepted them. In the second reading St. Paul writes about his faith as a revelation from God, and goes on to call this revelation “ a gift of grace from God”, to which he has dedicated his life.

So Scripture tells us that God gives gifts to us and our response is to offer gifts to him.

Gift is the essence of our relationship with God. If we understand gift better we should understand our relationship with God better.

The basic idea of gift is giving. Gifts are given freely and willingly, otherwise they are obligations like paying taxes. The giver must want to give a gift.

If we think of the infant Jesus we can see that God wanted to give him to us as a man. As St. John said, “God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son”.

Gifts mean something.

The gold, frankincense and myrrh were “sacred gifts of mystic meaning”.

They were symbols of Jesus’ kingship, his divinity and his suffering.

They were also expressions of the attitude of the wise men to Jesus.

They valued Jesus so much and felt so grateful to him that they wanted to give him something in return for the gift of himself to them.

Gifts are a symbol of the love of the giver for the one to whom the gift is given.

In other words gifts express love.

St, Matthew tells us that the wise men offered their gifts to Jesus. Offering suggests that the gift could be rejected. An offering is not an obligation. Jesus could have rejected their gifts.

We can reject gifts. Many people reject God’s gift of himself in Jesus. But if the gift is accepted the acceptance of the gift establishes and confirms a relationship of love between the giver and the receiver.

Jesus’ acceptance of the gifts from the wise men confirms the relationship of love between God and humankind, since the wise men represent us.

True gifts show that love is personal and individual.
The wise men gave their gifts to Jesus in person.
They went to a lot of trouble to find him.
They could have left the gifts with Herod to pass on.

There is a big difference between a personal gift and an anonymous handout. This was well illustrated by the experience of a homeless person writing in the *Big Issue*.

Sam wrote:

“Two days before Christmas I had been at the day centre Christmas party. It had been really nice, and we were all given a gift-wrapped present of a new rucksack.

There was something that was making me sad. I knew it would be the only Christmas present I received that Christmas. Don’t get me wrong, I was very grateful, but it wasn’t the same as someone personally choosing a gift for me. I was no longer in contact with family or friends and that was upsetting me.

Then one of my customers came along, and handed me a card and a gift-wrapped present. It was as if she had read my mind. I was so happy I hugged her. I saved the gift to open on Christmas Day. It meant so much to me that she had gone to the trouble of wrapping them up for **me**.”

That says it all. True gifts are chosen, prepared and given by one person to another. They are personal, not charity handouts even useful ones like the new rucksacks. They symbolise a relationship of love between the giver and the receiver.

God has given Jesus to us personally, freely and at great cost to himself.
Jesus is not a charity handout from God.

Gifts require the right response, thanks at least, a hug better still, eternal love best of all.

How should we Christians express our thanks to God?

Perhaps we could think of every good thing we have as gift; our environment, our food and our homes, our friends, our faith, and especially families in this year of the family.

If we think of all these things as gifts we will value and look after them, just as Sam valued his personal Christmas present, and we will want to hug God just as Sam hugged the giver of his gift.

So let’s pray that we may see all the good things we enjoy as personal gifts from God; that we value them, and respond with thanks, so that God’s giving and our thanking establish a relationship of eternal love between us.

Rev Geoff Carey