

HOMILY for the FEAST of the EPIPHANY – ABC

A devout Jew, Mrs. Feinstein offered up her prayers each week in the Temple. One week she prayed especially fervently. "Lord, I have always been a good Jew, & I've had a good life. I only have one complaint. I'm poor. Please, Lord, let me win the lottery."

The next week, Mrs. Feinstein was a little more strident. "Lord," she prayed, "have I ever missed a High Holy Day? Have I not fasted every Yom Kippur? Why must I go to my grave a pauper? One lottery win is all I'm asking you for."

The third week Mrs. Feinstein made no bones about her displeasure. "A faithful Jew such as myself, Lord, always observant, always dutiful, asks for one little favor, and what do I get?"

A glowing, white-bearded figure stepped down from heavens into the Temple. "Now, Mrs. Feinstein," boomed God, "don't you think you could at least meet me half way, and buy a ticket?"

That's exactly what the three astrologers did today – they headed out to meet the Lord halfway & find out the truth about the strange star. This Sunday the Church invites us to celebrate the Feast of Epiphany. If Christmas is about the divine revelation to the people of God, Epiphany is about the same revelation to the Gentiles & the rest of the world. This new revelation inspires the Magi/three astrologers from the East rushing toward Bethlehem to check out the newborn King of the Jews. The story of that revelation is reported in this Sunday's Gospel as following, "After Jesus' birth in Bethlehem of Judea during the reign of King Herod, astrologers from the East arrived one day in Jerusalem inquiring, 'Where is the newborn King of the Jews? We observed his star at its rising & have come to pay him homage.' At this news, King Herod became greatly disturbed, & with him all Jerusalem. Summoning all of the chief priests & scribes of the people, he inquired them where the Messiah was to be born. 'In Bethlehem of Judea,' they informed him. 'Here is what the prophet has written: 'And you, Bethlehem, land of Judea, are by no means least among the princes of Judah, since from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.''"

Evidently the Lord revealed His incarnation in our world with the appearance of a strange star in the sky. But, this is not the only way the Lord has sent us His signs & messages. As I explained before, the Lord has communicated to us day & night, even in our dreams. The reason why some people have been able to detect the divine signs & understand the divine messages is because they have had a special relationship with the Lord. It usually comes in the form of a life of prayers & virtues. I have shown you an example of it with St. Joseph. He was a prayerful & virtuous man whom God had talked to about receiving his wife Mary with child into his home & taking the Holy Family into hiding. His prayerful & virtuous lifestyle helped him pick up the divine signs like a magnet & also able to interpret them without any problem.

This Sunday we have seen a group of astrologers who were able to use their knowledge of the Universe to pick up a strange star in the sky. Then, they were able to consult with the spiritual leaders in the Jewish community to learn more about that star & its prophecies in the Scriptures. If they were not humble & open-minded to compare notes with the leaders in the spiritual field, they would not know much about the identity & messages of the star. They would not be able to connect the dots between the star & the birth of the newborn King in Bethlehem. So, they taught us an important lesson of collaborating with one another to learn

more about the divine messages for us in everyday life. Otherwise, we would miss out on the divine signs & messages for us every day. Unfortunately, that seems to be the problem of our current world as every field & religion refuses to dialogue with one another. It does not only result in missing out on lots of divine signs & messages but also causes one religion to hate another, or the field of science to oppose the field of faith. If every religion or field of study would collaborate with one another as we have seen in this Sunday's Gospel, we would be able to stop all the religious wars & make good use of the divine messages for us.

One of the advantages of understanding the divine messages was told in this Sunday's Gospel as following, "...After their audience with the king, they set out. The star which they had observed at its rising went ahead of them until it came to a standstill over the place where the child was. They were overjoyed at seeing the star, & on entering the house, found the child with Mary his mother. They prostrated themselves & did him homage. Then they opened their coffers & presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense, & myrrh. They received a message in a dream not to return to Herod; so they went back to their country by another route." That Scripture passage tells us that the three astrologers ran into a bad source of influence in evil King Herod & were able to overcome it. Historians testified that Herod was not only evil but also paranoid & manipulative. We have heard how he tried to manipulate the three astrologers to follow his wishes & make empty promises on paying tribute to Baby Jesus. But, the truth is that he wanted to kill Baby Jesus & eliminate his competition. In fact, we are able to see his evil soul & dark desires as King Herod ordered the murder of hundreds of three-year-old & under Jewish boys after he learned that the three astrologers would not return to him.

We could imitate the three astrologers & let the divine signs & messages guide us & help us avoid all the daily bad influences. If we do not do that, we will easily be manipulated & lured by evil power. Evil is real & might look scary as we might imagine. We have seen it in King Herod who was charming & looked normal like us. Only with the help of divine presence would we be able to expose the true identity of evil power. That is why we need to follow a life of prayers & virtues if we really want the divine presence to be with us. Otherwise, we will become a victim of evil power & worst yet let it use us to do its evil work.

My dear brothers & sisters, have you ever had an epiphany about something before? This Sunday we are allowed to reminisce about an important spiritual epiphany to the Gentiles & the rest of the world. This experience reminds us that God sends us signs & messages every day. Thankfully the three astrologers were able to pick them up & interpret them with the help of the Jewish religious leaders. We need to imitate their example & search for divine messages for us every day. That way we would truly find a life of peace & hope in this world.