

When it is cloudy outside, it is hard to see the stars twinkling at night. But even though we can't see the stars, they are still there. But on other nights, the clouds may be sparse and we get a glimpse at some of the stars in the sky. And then on clear nights, it is like we can see everything! As I reflected on the Gospel passage, I began to realize the many stars God has put in my life...both during the clear, cloudy, or stormy times of my life. From a small group of kids that invited me to Church when I was a teenager, having a step-father who helped me become a man, my baptism, to meeting my wife of now 30 years, to the birth of my son, to confirmation and receiving the Eucharist, to putting me in front of a Priest when I was diagnosed with prostate cancer last year, and to Holy Orders. These moments were "star" moments where God was providing me with direction...he was lighting the way...he was letting me know He is present. Each one of these moments were an epiphany, or a revelation in my life...sometimes I realized it right away and other times I did not figure it out until later. Moments where God was revealed in my life...where he appeared to me through each of those people or events in my life. Who or what are the stars in your life? Who keeps you moving in the right direction? Who is pointing you toward Christ?

Now, there were many times where I did not look up to the stars...where I allowed myself to remain in the darkness and covered by the clouds even when God was calling me to rise up in splendor like the people of Jerusalem in our Old Testament reading. Instead, I wanted to be a bit like Herod in my approach to life. I wanted to be in control of what I thought was "my own life". I wanted to follow my own agenda and I would do everything possible to run in the opposite direction of where God was calling me because I found it inconvenient or it was infringing on "my time". Today's world is just like Herod. The world is greatly troubled by Jesus. Notice how Herod was really being deceptive to the Magi. He didn't want to pay homage to Jesus...he wanted to kill Jesus! The world wants to tell us God is not important, that marriage is not a covenant, that my identity is found in whatever I want, that more money will make me happy, or that I should spend more time at work promoting my career, that a sporting event is more important than Mass, that religious education and adult formation means I have to get up a hour early, that my value as a human being is based on what others think about me, that babies in the womb are not a life, that taking care of the elderly is not important...and in many cases that God does not even exist. But even in these times where I did not want God...where I could not see him, regardless of what the world tries to tell us, just like the stars, God is always there. What are the things in your life that separate you from God? Where are you running in the wrong direction? Where is God on your priority ladder?

When we start to recognize the stars in our life, those stars that find their source in Jesus, just like the Magi, our priorities begin to change...we have ongoing conversion and continue to seek out Jesus. When this starts to happen, we begin to see more stars in our life. Those stars are more present even during the cloudy and stormy times of our life. We recognize there is something more than what the world has to offer...something divine that calls us to something greater than ourselves. Pope Benedict XVI described these faith experiences ...these stars...like those of the magi, in these words: "Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person – Jesus Christ – who gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction." And I can tell you, I have been down the road of decisive direction and still found myself at some point taking a detour. This is why God is constantly putting stars in our life to get us back on the road to God. Pope Benedict continues by saying "Faith is above all a personal, intimate encounter with Jesus, an experience of his closeness, his friendship, his love; only in this way does one learn to know him ever more, and to love and follow him ever more."

How do we get more intimate with Jesus? The simple answer is through frequent participation in and living out of the sacraments. Where we understand that God is pouring out His grace on us! Living out our baptismal call to be priest, prophet and king. Just like the magi, who brought the gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to Jesus, we are called to share our gifts to the world in such a way that our shining star brings others to Christ. Bringing others to God requires us to be close to God as well and to

be in relationship with Him. Through constant recognition of the gifts of the Holy Spirit sealed during confirmation –wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety and fear of the Lord. Embracing the gifts of the Holy Spirit will draw us closer into a relationship with Jesus. Through our spouse, recognizing the center of who I am and who my spouse is, is found in Christ. Reconciliation with God is so important because it is hard to be intimate with someone when your relationship is damaged or broken. Let me talk about this for a moment. I went to reconciliation when I was in Detroit a few weeks ago and I was waiting in line doing an examination of conscience. I realized the weight of my sins in a new and profound way. When I talk or gossip about people or get mad at them or treat them badly or unfairly, I am doing this to Christ because we are all members of the Body of Christ. It elevated the seriousness of my sins and really made me even more self-aware of how I treat others. It caused me to view more of my sins as being mortal instead of venial! Finally, nothing can be more intimate than receiving the Eucharist each time we go to Mass – Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity.

So, the Magi traveled thousands of miles from the East, following a star, to see Jesus. They went out of their way, out of their way of living, out of their way of belief, to come and pay homage to Jesus. We are called to do exactly the same thing in our lives. How far are we willing to go for Jesus...in our family, at our job, in our community, in our own spiritual lives? Are we willing to prostrate ourselves in front of Jesus, to conform our will to the will of God? On the day of our baptism...for each one of us ... a star was born. God wants our star to shine bright. The Epiphany of the Lord is a reminder that Jesus came for all people – we as Church have a very important role in bringing others to Christ. You have a very important role in bringing others to Christ. By the grace of God, transformed by the Eucharist...may each of our stars shine bright.