

## Pastor's Epiphany Homily – January 7, 2018

A friend of mine often sends me stories and little jokes that I put aside for various future homilies. A few months ago I received a story from him that I've saved for this Epiphany Sunday. It's called– The Bagpiper – apparently, a true story that goes like this:

“As a bagpiper, I play many gigs. Recently, I was asked by a funeral director to play at a graveside service for a homeless man. He had no family or friends, so the service was to be at a pauper's cemetery in the Nova Scotia back country. As I was not familiar with the backwoods, I got lost, and, being a typical man, I didn't stop for directions. I finally arrived an hour late and saw that the funeral guy had evidently left already and the hearse was nowhere in sight. There were only the diggers and crew left – and they were eating lunch. I felt badly and apologized to the men for being late. They didn't seem to know I was supposed to be there.

So, I went to the side of the grave and looked down into the hole. It appeared that the vault lid was already in place. I didn't know what else to do. So, I started to play. The workers put down their lunches and began to gather around. I played out my heart and soul for this man with no family and friends. I played like I've never played before for this homeless man. And, as I played “Amazing Grace,” the workers began to weep. They wept, I wept; we all wept together. When I finished, I packed up my bagpipes and started for my car. Though my head was hung low, my heart was full. As I opened the door to my car, I heard one of the workers say, ‘I've never seen *anything* like that before. And I've been putting in **septic tanks** for 20 years!’ ... Apparently, I'm still lost. It's a man thing.”

The beautiful story of the Epiphany almost always falls on the first Sunday of a new calendar year. It comes at a time that we can “re-orient” ourselves (our lives) in a new direction of following the Lord. The Magi (like the bagpiper) briefly lost sight of the star to Bethlehem as they passed through Jerusalem. Unlike the bagpiper and many men, the Magi did ask for directions – but they asked the wrong person. Their good and sincere intentions – lead to the slaughter of the Holy Innocents.

Herod was distrustful and preoccupied with the birth of a frail child – whom he thought of as a rival. Of course, Jesus wasn't interested in usurping a king – who happened to be a “puppet” of the Romans. But Jesus was interested in overthrowing the devil and leading His people out of darkness – into the Light. Epiphany is about the journey of life that we're all traversing – hopefully towards the Light. But the reality is – it's very easy to get lost and yet act (pretend, or assume) as if we're right where we're supposed to be! Like the bagpiper.

Have you ever seen an inviting path and started down it, even though you didn't know where it would lead? Questions start to pop up in your mind. The way could be longer than you're prepared for. You may not be wearing the right shoes, or have enough water with you. You don't know when you may return — or if this path ever comes back this way at all.

Taking an unknown route is an adventure: Maybe you're “*boldly going where no one has gone before.*” It's safer, of course to meekly go where someone else has gone. The unknown harbors risk – but also the excitement of discovery. Only seekers will take a path they don't know and travel to an undetermined destination. The rest of us prefer to stay at home – surrounded by the familiar. It's safer! Some of us, in fact, are only willing to move down smooth, paved, and well-traveled lanes, where just about *everybody* has gone before. But the best-traveled roads often have the least to show us.

Today's story is about travelers who took a very peculiar route to a destination with no guarantees. Because they were following a star, they had to travel at night, “*walking by faith and not by sight.*” They took big risks, passing through foreign territory that could be full of enemies. But what they were after, they were sure, was worth it! Even though, for sure, they themselves didn't comprehend the whole story or the mystery of the journey.

Whether we intend it or not, we’re all on a journey through this world of ours. Some of these journeys won’t take us beyond the confines of our routines, but others lead beyond our wildest dreams! And as we travel, we bring along what’s most precious to us — our riches or our relationships or the work of our hands — by any other name, our **gold**. We also bear **frankincense**, the symbol of our relationship with God, the “fragrance” of our prayer, rising up like smoke to God. Finally, we carry our **myrrh**, that which prepares us for the hour of our death.

All of these **gifts** are vital, because we have to live fully invested in the world we know, and, at the same time live *toward* the world we cannot see but that is (sure) to come. The Magi show us how it’s done. We’re traveling a road where *someone*, at least, has gone before. We walk by faith and not by certainty. We bring our gifts, prepared to offer them freely the hour when they are required of us. And perhaps the greatest lesson of the Magi is that, like them, we become what we are seeking. The hope of the Magi made them as radiant as the star they followed. Each became what he turned his face toward.

The question for us is, as Pope Francis says: “*what star have we chosen to follow in our lives? Some stars may be bright but do not point the way.*” [Epiphany, 2018] If we turn toward the glitter of this world with its fame and fortune, we become insubstantial, sparkling for only a short while. You know, with the Golden Globe Awards set for tonight, it’s very interesting to note the progression of our celebrities: → on the cover of *Time* Magazine today and on the cover of *The Enquirer* tomorrow. That’s the kind of “progression” many seek out. So the question is – what direction are we headed-in? ... If we turn our faces toward the Holy One, we will become a holy people, and shine like the stars for eternity. Nothing we gain on this route can ever be lost.

This beautiful Epiphany story is also a great reminder that much of what life offers occurs – or is a result of – our **just showing up** – like the bagpiper story. Much of life is “just being there,” making sure we are present and allowing God’s grace to flow from that! I have a friend who says that 95% of all we accomplish in life happens from “*just showing up.*” What would have happened if the Magi decided not to show up after encountering Herod? They could have concluded that the rest of the trip was too political or too dangerous. But they showed up, offered their gifts, and left by a different route.

We live in a time of tension, separation, political turmoil and unrest. Today, it seems even more important than ever that we show up regularly as the representatives of Jesus, proclaiming in word and deed His message of peace, tranquility, harmony and love. It is more important than ever that we show up as the manifestation of Jesus within us. At Communion time we’ll sing the song – “*this little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine.*” That’s all we have to do. And the LIGHT that is coming into the world – will carry us forward on the journey of faith throughout the New Year! Happy Little Christmas!

*Msgr Frank Caldwell*