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## EPIPHANY

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Jean PATEAU  
Abbot of Our Lady of Fontgombault  
(Fontgombault, January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2023)

*Ambulabunt gentes in lumine tuo.*  
The Gentiles shall walk in Thy light.  
(*Is* 60:3)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,  
My dearly beloved Sons,

**A** LITTLE LESS THAN a fortnight ago, we adored in Bethlehem the Divine Child Who was just born in a stable. Today, it is again near this Child that the Church convokes us, as three Wise Men coming from the East are offering Him their gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

The itinerary of these Wise Men is most unusual. Their guide is a star. They ignore which place they are expected in. What they do know, is that they are walking towards a king, the King of the Jews that has just been born. The mere sight of His star was enough for them to set off on the road, in order to prostrate themselves before Him.

The liturgy makes a correlation between the visit of the Wise Men in the crib, and the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy. The Lord, Whose birth was known to a few shepherds only, manifests Himself to the nations in the person of the Wise Men. From now on, men and women of all races, nations and tongues, are called to set off towards Him, to unite themselves to Christ, the head of the Church, so as to become members of a great body.

Are we not already attending the miracle of Pentecost? The day on which men coming from all the parts of the world will hear in their own dialect, in their mother tongue, the wonderful works of God being proclaimed. <sup>a</sup>

a. Cf. *Acts* 2:8-11.

The announcement of movable feasts also calls our attention to the fact that we as well are on a path, that of the liturgical year. Outside the Church there is no salvation. <sup>b</sup>

b. Cf. *CCC*,  
n. 846-848.

Let us therefore listen to the lesson taught by the Wise Men. Let's enter their school, so as to make our communion with Christ and His Church more perfect.

Walking towards the crib means leaving one's own home, so as to make the choice of "God's home". The monastic tradition, in the wake of the calling addressed by the Lord to the rich young man, bears witness to the importance of this renouncement. Those who are attached to their material or intellectual goods, to their own way of thinking to the point of being unable to call it into question, cannot set off on the road. They are imprisoned in their own dwelling, in their home. As to the Wise Men, they are free.

The Wise Men of the Epiphany are walking together, and there are three of them. An African proverb says, "If you want to go fast, walk alone. But if you want to go far, let us walk together." The Church on the synodal path invites us us to take into consideration not so much how the others are walking with us, as how we walk with the others. The others are our contemporaries. They are also the Christians of all times, all nations, who bequeath to us the priceless treasure of Tradition. Walking together means listening to all of these brothers. It also means preserving the unity of the faith. How many wounds have been inflicted, and still are, to the unity of the body, which is the Church!

The way is not an easy one for the Wise Men. They are not spared from being put to the proof in their faith. Wasn't it imprudent to commit their lives so as to follow a star... which, what is more, has just disappeared? Their doubt thickens, when those who should have set off on the road to Bethlehem to adore their own king, merely give the Wise Men an indication, without bothering to move. Today, many Christians are surrounded by

the ordeal of doubt: doubts concerning the probity of statesmen; doubts concerning the ethical formation delivered by schools to their children; doubts concerning the information received from media. We might make this list longer, and add to it the doubts concerning some churchmen and their teaching.

The Wise Men's path bears witness to God's faithfulness, even in hardship. His grace and presence are enough. The Wise Men will reach their goal.

Here they are now, entering the stable and offering gold, frankincense, and myrrh to the Emmanuel.

Gold, for He is the great King; frankincense, since He is the true God; myrrh, meant for His burial.<sup>a</sup>

*a. Antiphon for  
Benedictus, 1st day  
after Epiphany.*

Through the Wise Men, through their gifts, it is the Church which is offering herself to our contemplation. She moves towards her Lord, rich with men and women, some of them already in the light of the vision of God, others still walking on the road of faith. She shines forth with the zeal of the evangelizers, bishops, priests, religious, or laymen, who proclaim in season and out of season the good news of the Saviour's coming, sometimes at the risk of their own lives. She blazes with the prayers of contemplative souls, of cloistered religious, monks and nuns. Here is the gold.

From this huge people, there rises to the Divine Child an adoration ceasing neither by day nor by night: here is the incense.

Adorned for her Spouse, the Church receives in her bosom sinners who need to encounter God's mercy and the forgiveness of men. In the communion with the Paschal mystery, the death and resurrection of Jesus, the one and only Saviour, will they find reconciliation and peace. As she offers the myrrh, the Church beseeches from the Child in the crib a grace of purification for her children.

Myrrh is the last gift offered by the Wise Men. Although it is not as precious as gold and incense, it is the gift that the Child in the crib receives with the greatest gratefulness and joy. Assuredly, He is the great God, Creator of the universe, to Whom everything belongs: to Him is due the gold. Indeed, this Child is the thrice-holy God, the Most High, all glory and honour is

His: to Him is due the incense. Yet, if this great God is lying there, a humble child in a poor stable, it is because He wants to manifest Himself as a beggar, the vessel that receives our misery, so as to fulfil us with His mercy. The Epiphany then becomes the feast of those, whoever they may be, who abandon themselves to God. For them, sin and evil are no longer the final word. After accepting their own misery and calling on His mercy, the path of forgiveness, the way back to grace, opens before them.

The Wise Men then prepare to go away from the crib. Very likely, they announce that they will go back by another way. Mary feels somewhat hampered by the gifts.

In the footsteps of the Wise Men, let us take a new way, and receive from the Child in the crib, as a viaticum, three gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

With the gold, let us marvel at the beauties of the Church and of our brothers. The incense should stimulate our so often slumberous hearts to prayer and adoration. Lastly, the myrrh is a reminder of our condition of sinners, and a call to penance, in the hope of forgiveness.

The Gospel doesn't mention a fourth gift, the traditional cakes. Let us share them during the present days, and remember the path of faith, hope, and charity, on which the Wise Men are expecting us.

Amen, Alleluia.

