

HOMILY

The Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord

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A family was driving through Kansas on vacation. Five-year-old Tyler was looking out the car window. “Boy,” he said, “it’s so flat out there. ***You can look father than you can see.***” That’s a great phrase—“You can look farther than you can see.” Let’s talk about looking farther than you can see.

In the early 1930s an engineer named Joseph Strauss looked out over San Francisco Bay. In his mind he formed a picture of a beautiful bridge connecting the two sides of the Bay. In 1936, the Golden Gate Bridge became a reality.

Many of you will remember when President George Bush the Elder, father of our current president, was criticized for not focusing on long-term goals and strategies. The former president agreed that he wasn’t very big on what he called “the vision thing.” Now we are engaged in another presidential election year. As always, we hope we can elect a president who has this vision thing down pat. We need people who can look farther than they can see.

The world needs a new vision. Critics of the war in Iraq clamor for a vision of how to extricate ourselves honorably from this costly, bloody conflict. All of us look at the challenge of terrorism and long for a vision, a cure, from this deadly scourge. People of conscience look at our public healthcare system and cry for a new vision of how to care for the uninsured. Scientists look at the troubling signs of rising global temperatures and hope for a new vision of how to stave off a potential crisis. Many of us long for a vision that will unite us as people. This month a strategic pastoral plan for our parish will be presented to the Parish Council, envisioning the strategy for the next five years that will, hopefully, make us an even more vibrant parish. In February, the parishes from the Genesee County region will bring our recommendations to our Bishop and the Strategic Planning Committee for our Diocese.

“The vision thing,” so important.

Closer to home, many of us need a new vision for our personal lives. Some of us are bogged down in a sea of guilt and regret. Others of us feel something is missing from our lives. If only we see something that we haven't seen before.

An African-American pastor led a thriving church. Many of its members were actively serving the surrounding community. As to the secret of his success, the pastor responded, "I hold a crown above my people's head and watch them grow into it." That's the power of vision. Nothing happens without vision. The world hungers for people with vision . . . for people who can look farther than they can see.

In the year 7 B.C., the planets Jupiter and Saturn appeared very close together in the night sky, casting a bright glow similar to that of a single large star. The following year, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn were also closely aligned. Some scholars believe that one of these two events produced the bright light in the sky the Wise Men followed when they came to Bethlehem 2,000 years ago. You know the story. What fascinates me is that hundreds of thousands of people living in that part of the world saw the same bright light in the sky but they did not leave their homes to find the newborn king. What was different about these Magi? Vision!

Today is called Epiphany. It is a celebration of the coming of the Magi. An epiphany is a new way of seeing or understanding. It is so appropriate that the first Sunday of the new year should begin with an epiphany. A new way of seeing, a vision, an image of what our world can be, of what our lives can yet be. Like the Magi, we need to open our minds, stretch our imaginations.

Did you come searching today or have you found all you need in your new iPod? Your work? A new hobby? Are you so content with the things of this world that you no longer hunger for a fresh encounter with God? God loves searchers. The Wise Men were searchers. They were searchers who set out on a journey of faith. There are many journeys that people take. Some people journey into alternative lifestyles. Some journey into alcohol and drugs. So many people are taking destructive journeys in our world, following so many false stars. There are many journeys we can take in today's world. Many voices we can listen to, many stars that we can follow. But only one leads us onto the path of abundant life.

I want to challenge you today to set out on a journey of faith in this brand new year. Get deep into our faith. Join a Bible study. Spend more time in prayer. Focus more intently on God's purpose for your life. The Wise Men were searchers

who were on a journey of faith. Their goal was to bow before the newborn king. And when they found him, they bowed down before him and offered him gifts. These gifts represent the Magi's devotion. They gave of themselves.

Here is the key to life:

Give of yourself.

Give of yourself to God.

Give of yourself to others.

Here it is. Epiphany. Seeing life with new eyes. Vision. Seeing in the world new possibilities. That is what I wish for each of us this day. The Magi came searching. Their search took them on a journey of faith. When they found the newborn king they offered him gifts. Gifts that represented the best of what was in them. This is the kind of vision we need as we begin this new year—a vision to build new lives and a new world.