

Epiphany of the Lord, C

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Since the start of the new year, most of us have returned to some familiar questions and conversations about our lives. Where are we headed? Where is our life going? What are we really after?

I am also asking those questions regarding our parish. Where is St. Ann going in 2025?

After the terrorist attack in New Orleans and many other tragic and senseless events from the first hours of the New Year, I also cannot help but wonder where our county is headed in this new year.

What kind of new year questions are you asking about your life and future? And how is that going for you?

I have got to be honest with you, I am struggling with those questions and conversations. The answers are not as clear today as when I was younger or just a few years ago, and the questions feel more difficult. I keep waiting for a flash of insight, an epiphany, an **“Aha, I got it,”** but it is not coming.

I am finding those conversations and questions all end in the same way, with me saying, **“I don’t know, I just don’t know anymore.”**

And I don’t think I am the only one who doesn’t know. Have there not been times when you didn’t know where your life was going, times when you just were not sure where you were headed?

I think about the wise men in today's gospel and wonder if they asked similar questions or had similar conversations about where they were headed. They didn't know where they were going the day they left home. They didn't know where they would be the next day, the next week, or six months later. They couldn't see their destination any more than I could see the destination of my life, this parish, or our country.

Here is the thing that strikes me about the journey of the wise men. They did not know their destination until they arrived. That seems obvious right now, but I often forget or overlook that. And what if that is true for you and me as well? What if we don't know our destination until we arrive? No wonder my questions and conversations don't get me anywhere. No wonder they all end the same way. No wonder I don't know.

But maybe we don't need to know and maybe the wise men didn't either. In one of her letters, Emily Dickinson writes this: **“The sailor cannot see the North but knows the needle can.”**

Those sure fit today's gospel. The wise men cannot see the child or Bethlehem, but they know the star can. Maybe we can never see the destination, we can only follow the star.

What stars are you following these days? What is the compass in your life?

Let me give you some examples of what I mean. I am asking about things like this:

The values and qualities that direct and guide your life.

The wise women and men whose advice and counsel you seek and trust.

The principles and standards to which you hold yourself accountable.

The scriptures and prayers that shape and form your life.

The deep longings, desires, and callings that energize and move your life forward.

The silence, stillness, and solitude, by which you gain clarity.

The people and relationships that orient your life; and the practices by which you maintain your integrity and authenticity.

What if those are the light of Epiphany in each of our lives? And what if it is not just one star but a whole constellation giving shape and direction to our lives? And what if we were less concerned about where we are going and more concerned about the way we are going?

I cannot tell you where my life, this parish, or our country are going but I can tell you the way I want to go. I can tell you the stars I want to follow.

I want to go by way of love. I want to go by way of justice, truth, and honesty. I want to go by way of compassion, inclusion, welcome, and care for others. I want to go by way of integrity and authenticity. I want to go by way of gratitude and forgiveness.

What about you? What stars do you want to follow? By what ways do you want to go?

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Here is the paradox in today's gospel. The wise men did not know their destination, but they knew the way. They knew which star to follow. And that was enough. That was all they needed to know. They followed the star, and it took them exactly where they needed to go.

Why would it be any different for us? The star knows the way.

Amen.