

Feast of the Epiphany

January 2, 2011

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I imagine we have all had the experience of just gazing at the moon. I do this especially when there is a full moon. On a clear night, the moon is spectacular as it is framed in darkness. It is amazing how much it can light a dark night. Much the same is true of the stars. Isn't it a special treat to be in the countryside or the mountains on a clear night? Isn't it a special treat not to have house lights and street lights and car lights and lighted signs invading the darkness? Then we can look up and really see countless stars shining in all their beauty.

These experiences are something like the experience that the three magi had. They looked up into the dark sky and saw a bright star. They followed that star and it brought them to the newborn Jesus, to the Lord himself. Have you ever reflected that stars like the one the magi saw can only be seen against a backdrop of darkness? This is a simple, obvious fact, but it is good to be aware of it. And isn't it true that sometimes we want to have stars or light without darkness? Like right now, in the Christmas season, aren't we tempted to say: wouldn't it be nice if every day were like Christmas? Wouldn't it be nice if each day of the year were full of such high and warm spirit? Wouldn't it be nice if there were no bad news and no sadness? Of course, life is not like that. In real life there is always both sweet and sour, joy and mourning, health and sickness, light and darkness. Embracing the dark with the light is a sign of wisdom but the wisdom does not end there.

We also have the ability to control our focus and choose what we look at. We can decide to look at the stars or to look at the darkness. People whom we would regard as effective usually have their share of sorrows and setbacks like anyone else. What makes them effective is that they generally concentrate on the light rather than on the darkness. If we begin reflecting on all the bad things that happen in our lives, it will soon depress us, but if we focus on the good, we will be uplifted. If we want to find fault with our spouse or friend or whomever, we will. But if we look for their good points, we are sure to find them.

The point is that life is often made or broken by what we consistently look at: the stars or the darkness. Happiness often depends on little more than a shift in focus. We don't pretend the darkness does not exist, but like the

magi we can choose to concentrate on the stars. So the question is: where is our focus? Are we usually star-gazers? Do we look for light in the darkness that confronts us? We can take control of where we direct our attention. We can talk more about our dreams than our misfortunes, more about our hopes than our disappointments. We can notice a storm but look for its rainbow. Instead of seeing things just as problems, we can see them as challenges or opportunities. Above all, we need to follow the stars – holy persons, inspiring writers, the Scripture – we need to follow the stars that shed light. If we do this, like the magi we will come to the one who is “*God from God, light from light.*” We will be with the light and in the light and even become the light for those around us.