

The Wonder of it all

It isn't difficult to discover from where Matthew obtained his material for the story of the magi. You only have to listen to today's first reading and the responsorial psalm to get a glimpse of what images shaped his narrative thought as he set about putting into words the great revelation that had been made manifest. But however you wish to approach it, the meaning of the story has a very clear imperative; namely that in the coming of Christ, God's revelation of his redeeming love is alive and active in Jesus, and this revelation has a continuing and enduring effect on us, because it makes us think deeply about ourselves and about the nature of our humanity. This realisation must change us and make us act in a way that shows to the world the power of this love.

The best way to express this love is by applying the gospel values which we so treasure, to the lives which we lead. At the heart of today's gospel story, the treasure which the magi offer is placed before the child Jesus. In a startling way, these gifts describe the very gospel which we are called upon to live by. Gold, frankincense and myrrh may seem a strange combination, yet a little reflection will uncover that in them is encapsulated the whole concept of "gospel love" which pervades our calling as Christians.

Gold is precious, and there is nothing more precious to us than our own lives. In handing over this gift we are offering our lives to God. We are making ourselves available to God for him to shape and mould us as his instruments. Most beautifully we do this in and through one another. In our relationships and in our families we become each other's gifts, sharing and exchanging love as we experience the everyday events which impact on us. Growing and maturing in this love, we become aware of God's presence amongst us through the countless acts of kindness and goodness which we give and receive.

Our thoughts are thus opened up to the closeness of God to us in the person of Jesus who walks with us. We feel his touch. we recognise his voice and we know he is truly present. Through the spiritual and prayerful dimension of our lives, Jesus reveals himself to us in word and sacrament. The sanctity of our lives becomes a real and living component that will help to guide us in the moral decisions and ethical choices we are called upon to make. None more so than in the challenge which innocent suffering brings in whatever form it comes. The gospel never shies away from this dilemma, and the myrrh of bitter affliction can make its mark on us with sudden and unexpected cruelty. There is no easy answer, no simple remedy, only the call to trust in the love that knows no limits. For Jesus the cross must be carried, and we all have a share in it.

These three gifts then are symbols of what the revelation of God's love means. The gospel calls on us to *lose* or to *renounce* our lives as a condition of gaining them. We can only do this by entering into a more profound relationship with Christ. This relationship is forged by living in obedience to his word and in accordance with his deeds. What comes about when this happens is something remarkable:

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field which someone has found; he hides it again, goes off in his joy, sells everything he owns and buys the field.

Let us open up our lives and find the hidden treasure that is in each of us and marvel at the

wonder that we have received by this revelation.