Parents: God-Seekers Together With Their Children

Part #5 – Fr. Bill Rowland, S.M.

On January 6, we celebrate the Feast of the Epiphany. The word Epiphany comes from a Greek word that means manifestation. Today we celebrate Jesus manifesting himself, making himself known to the Magi who represent people from every nation and culture and every time in history. Their story sheds light on our personal stories of how Jesus manifests himself to us and how we are to respond.

Who were these Magi? At the time of Jesus, there was a relatively sophisticated culture of stargazing in Babylon located in present-day Iraq. The Magi were a combination of what we would call astronomers, astrologers, and God-seekers. Most likely, they would sleep during the day to be awake during the night when they would study the stars. Not only were they interested in learning about the stars and the planets, but they were also studying the night sky to discern God's intentions and purposes for the world. These men, these Magi, were alert and attentive to what God was up to. Perhaps that is why we call them Wise Men. They knew something about the ways of God and can teach us how to discern God's purposes in our own lives. The first lesson they teach us is to be attentive and alert to how God is at work in our world and our lives.

That is essentially the message the Society of Mary asks Marists to ponder during the 2022 Marist Year for Vocations. It began on November 15, the anniversary of the death of Society of Mary founder Jean-Claude Colin, and will conclude on the same date next year. During this year, Marist religious are to ***enrich*** their vocation, ***encourage*** one another to live their Marist vocation with greater fidelity, and ***assist*** others in discerning their vocations, including living as a Marist religious or as a member of the Marist Laity.

Here is how you can help. Those who are married, have a family, or are single may not recognize their state in life as a response to a call from God. Furthermore, they may not automatically connect their work with furthering God's purposes in the world. If the laity does not perceive themselves as God-seekers, then when they meet young adults, especially their children, who sincerely seek God's intentions for their lives, they won't know how to respond.

Whom does Jesus call? This feast of the Epiphany answers that question. He calls everyone. He is constantly manifesting Himself and his purposes to us. How does the Lord do this?

Most of us are stargazers. At night, we watch television shows with our favorite celebrities who star in them. Many of us gaze at these stars at night, especially when we can't sleep. How many of us are alert and attentive to what God may be speaking to us through a movie plot or a line from one of the characters?

How many of us study the events in our days to discern how Our Lord manifests himself to us? The people we meet, an accident that interrupts our lives, a conversation on the phone, and the Masses we attend are just some of the examples of how Our Lord speaks to us. We often complain about God's silence. From another perspective, it can be said that God never stops talking to us.

When reflecting on the story of the Magi, I can't help but believe that this was their purpose in life. These Magi were born at that time and place and given a love for the stars, a keen interest in God, and a desire to serve Him. To recognize the significance of the star and to follow it to Christ was their purpose in life – their mission from God.

John Henry Newman said, "We have all been made for a definite purpose." What is your purpose in life? What is your mission? A journalist may choose that profession because she is committed to discovering the truth. Is not God the ultimate truth? Did not Jesus himself say that he is the way, the truth, and the life? When a person is devoted to seeking the truth, she allows God, who is truth, to work through her. A good reporter will be passionate about uncovering deceit because the power of the truth has seized her. Whether she knows it or not, she has been called by God. Whether she realizes it or not, she has said, "Yes." To what mission or purpose in life have you said "yes" to God?

When the Magi reached where the Christ Child was, they opened their treasures and presented him with gold because he was a king, frankincense because he was God, and myrrh because he would die. These gifts were expensive—the very best of what they had to offer.

What are the Magi, these God-seekers teaching us? They invite us to ask ourselves what is the best that we have that we can offer to Christ. We are to offer him the best of our minds, the best of our creativity, the very best of ourselves. All of us are called to offer Christ what is precious or gold. For parents, their children are what is most precious to them. They are a gift from God. In turn, how can they be a gift to God?

Here is where the Magi, these Wise Men, can help. Parents and grandparents: Are you willing to serve as Magi to your children? Speak to your children and grandchildren about how you recognized God's purpose for you and how that became the star that has directed your lives. Witness the courage it took to accept your mission in life. Talk about your confrontation with Herod—the opposition to fulfilling God's mission for you that you had to overcome. Share with them how your lives went in a different direction after accepting your mission from Christ, like the Magi who returned home by a different route. Witness how all of this has made you wiser in understanding the ways of God. Share how your life has been blessed and enriched because you gave to Him what you treasured the most.

St. Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, writes, "There is a power already at work in you that can do infinitely more than you can ask or imagine." (Ephesians 3:20) Encourage your children and grandchildren to recognize that power as the Spirit of Christ. Teach them to pay homage to his Spirit and offer Christ the very best of their creativity, their generosity, and their very selves. Encourage your children and grandchildren to follow the Magi and become one of them: a seeker of God and God's purposes that they are being called to serve.