Day 2 — The Infant King of the JEWS

MORNING

Take yourself to a quiet place. Remember that you are in the presence of God.

Whom do you want to bring to prayer today?

What grace would you like to receive today?

Prayer

O God of tender mercy, your love for us has drawn you to be one with us in Christ. You are breaking down the barriers between nations by the force of that love in our hearts. Help us always to be persons of peace in union with those who actively build it in society. Grant this through your Christ whose gift is the blessing of peace in the midst of chaos. Amen.

Today’s Reflection will lead us to think about the Jewish people
What follows historically in the tradition is a very circuitous, even disastrous road, about Jesus’ mission. The wise men call him “King of the Jews;” but very soon after his death his early followers set out to spread his message to lands beyond where Jesus lived and preached. There are no boundaries to Jesus’ mission and message.

In 70 CE the question arose, “If I want to be a follower of Jesus but am not Jewish, must I become Jewish first in order to follow him?” A meeting of community leaders in Jerusalem said, “No, you do not.” We now call this meeting the Council of Jerusalem and note that the very first meeting of its kind opens wide the doors of Jesus’ message about the kingdom of God. At the same time, this meeting, among other events, is seen as leading to the split between Judaism and the followers of Jesus.

**Reflection / Discussion**

Recall historical times when the relationship between Christians and Jewish people was good.

You will remember more clearly, perhaps, times when the relationship between the two groups was disastrous. What are those times? Are some historical? Others contemporary?

Have I ever experienced this antagonism personally?

**Prayer**

Forgive us, God, when we live our lives within the lines, when we say this is the shape of our work this is the boundary of our habitation these are the limits to our love these are the lines of our vision these and none other. Draw us beyond our patterns into yours; shifting, moving, curving, spiraling, many-colored, ever changing, stretching, pushing, challenging, renaming, unsettling, disturbing, casting forth, and welcoming home.

Jan Richardson, *Night Visions*
An event of great significance

John XXIII, during the second World War, issued fraudulent documents (baptismal certificates, etc) in order to save Jewish lives from the Nazis. It is John who assured both Jewish leaders and scripture scholars that the subject of Jewish-Christian relations would be on the agenda of Vatican Council II.

Reflect on the following passages from Vatican II — *Nostra Aetate 4*

... Christians and Jews have a common spiritual heritage....

... The Church of Christ acknowledges that in God’s plan of salvation the beginning of her faith and election is to be found in the patriarchs, Moses and the prophets ... The Church cannot forget that she received the revelation of the Old Testament by way of that people with whom God in his inexpressible mercy established the ancient covenant.

God does not take back the gifts he bestowed or the choice he made.

Imagine this wonderful symbol also found in *Nostra Aetate*

> Nor can she forget  
> *that she draws nourishment*  
> *from that good olive tree onto which*  
> *the wild olive branches*  
> *of the Gentiles have been grafted.*

Take the phrases separately

—(Christian church) draws nourishment.  
(present tense)

—No need to go to ancestors.com. Our roots as Catholic Christians are in Judaism. And we continue to be nurtured by it. What do you think this means?

—In the whole of the symbol, Judaism is the good olive tree. What does that mean to you?
—We are wild branches! I will leave this to your own imagination. Do you like being thought of as a ‘wild branch’?

—We have been grafted on to the good olive tree. What other concepts mean something similar? Children by adoption? Cousins not siblings? Marriage commitment? Friendship?

—What ways, personally, have you experienced being nourished by the Jewish community through traditions, friends, holidays, rituals?

—Do you see evidence of mutual nourishment between the two faith communities?

Prayer

Lord, Jesus, you are the star inviting all nations to fulness of life. Give us the wisdom to walk in your light. This we ask in your name. Amen.
Matthew must have trusted strongly that God could work through vastly different faith traditions, because there they are, in Matthew’s Gospel alone, a group of questionable pagans—not Luke’s shepherds following an angel’s good news—but people well outside the acceptable norms, trusting and searching, until they become the first people other than family to encounter the Christ child. That single challenging plot-point opens the experience of the Epiphany so that it blossoms for us as the feast day of the blessed adventure of every seeker of God, the great excursion of all who respond to God’s first tug at their heart. The feast of Epiphany becomes a celebration of the life-journeys of every person who has found God because God found them first. God, the goal of every spiritual quest—the ocean to which all the rivers of yearning run. Every yearning for salvation, for healing, for justice or mercy. Every yearning for wisdom, for love, for forgiveness. These are yearnings planted in the heart by God who leads all kinds and types of people from a multitude of perspectives, languages and traditions.

When the magi came and knelt down, Karl Rahner writes, “they only did what they had in reality always been doing, what they were already doing during their search and journey: they brought before the invisible face of God now made visible the gold of their love, the incense of their reverence and the myrrh of their suffering.”

Maybe that is why we like to think of them as kings. Maybe we recognize the dignity and the purity of their hearts and actions. Maybe we recognize the majesty of anyone who has poured out their whole heart for a star that has caught their souls. Who has come from some distant place and been granted a new heart—a royal heart—and an adventurous new path home. Maybe that is what is so compelling about the story of the magi that makes us want to call them kings—even to name them, give them homes and backgrounds. Their story is like so many of ours—stories of maturing through challenges.
If you consent to follow, you can’t take much with you. You have gifts to bring: the gold of your love, the frankincense of your yearning and prayer, and the myrrh of your suffering as a reminder. God has already found you and, if you consent to follow, God will lead you closer and closer. Together, we will find Christ. Together, we will kneel and leave everything there. And then we will go home by another road.

What phrases from this Epiphany homily speak to you?

Recall St. Augustine’s message: “Our hearts are restless, O Lord, until they rest in you.”

Reflect on the phrase from the Eucharistic prayer: “all those who seek with a sincere heart.”

What thought or insight from today do you want to voice?

Intercessions

Led by the light of a star, magi came to worship the child, the infant king of the Jews. In our longing for truth, let us pray:

guide all who seek you, O God.

Creator of the world, complete the work you have begun;
help us to hear and live the message of Jesus.

God of nations, you see us all as your children;
draw us to unity that mirrors your own.

Source of all truth, you dwell within us, the light of our minds;
let us never silence your voice.

Word of God, made flesh, the Magi adored you in a child;
help us to recognize you in one another.

Eternal God, you know our needs and you care for us;
help us to see the things that you see.

Lord, Jesus, you are the star inviting all nations to fulness of life.
Give us the wisdom to walk in your light. This we ask in your name. Amen.