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EPIPHANY

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Jean PATEAU
Abbot of Our Lady of Fontgombault
(Fontgombault, January 6th, 2025)

Per aliam viam.
By another way.
(Mt 2:12)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,
My dearly beloved Sons,

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING to St. Matthew opens with a magnificent triptych. The first panel is the genealogy of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham. “Abraham begot Isaac.” Now if Isaac was the child of promise,^a how much more Jesus! Yet, the long list of the Lord’s forebears ends with a query: “And Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, Who is called Christ.”^b Jesus was begotten by Mary, not Joseph. a. Gal 4:28.

The second panel of the triptych removes the doubt. The angel of the Lord appears to Joseph in a dream, and tells him that the child’s conception comes from the Holy Spirit, and that His name will be “Jesus,” namely, “The Lord saves”, “for He shall save His people from their sins.”^c And lastly, that in Him will be fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy: b. Mt 1:16.

Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel.^d c. Mt 1:20.

The third panel consists in the narrative of Jesus’ childhood, with the picturesque and abundantly developed episode of the journey of the Wise Men, who were heathens, to the crib, d. Is 7:14;
cf. Mt 1:23.

followed by the flight into Egypt, the massacre of the Innocents, and the Holy Family's return to Nazareth after Herod's death.

After that, the Gospel will merely be a development of this triptych, in which everything has already been told: God came in our midst to save us. The great hope, the encounter with the Lord, is from now on offered to every man, who is invited to set out towards his God in an approach of repentance, charity, faith, and hope. Such is our motto for the Jubilee in this 2025th year of the Saviour's birth: *Pilgrims of Hope*.

Let us draw some lessons from this morning's gospel.

Should the temptation of despair be lurking, the Wise Men and the shepherds bear witness to the fact that, even in the heart of darkness, light is never lacking on the path of those who are upright in heart. In the middle of the night, an angel came to meet the shepherds, maybe awaking them from their slumber. A star invited the Wise Men to forsake their daily routine and set out.

As the shepherds and Wise Men, let us be watchful, paying heed to God's signs, and pondering His word. In the middle of our nights, God is never absent. His star is always shining. Let us look for it so as to set out, pilgrims of hope. St. Augustine's words, as he was considering his past life, remain topical: "Thou wert with me, but I was not with Thee."^e

e. *Confessions*,
X, 27³⁸.

Another lesson stems from the remark that the path of the shepherds and that of the Wise Men, even though they both end up at the same place, are very different.

For the former, a few words from an angel, a few steps, and already the stable of Bethlehem and the Child it contains are before them.

For the latter, no messenger... no words... Merely a star, and the intuition that it is the star of "the newborn King of the Jews."^f What a lesson of faith and hope these pagans give us!

f. *Mt 2:2*.

It often so happens that we regard the path of our own lives as very hard, whereas we deem the path of the others to be so easy. As a matter of fact, we don't exhaust ourselves on the path of others, whereas it is so easy to despair on our own path. Let us believe in faith that the path on which God has invited us, and has been walking beside us for such a long time, eventually reaches the crib.

But are the Wise Men really going towards the crib? They have now reached in Jerusalem, and they enter Herod's palace. No doubt they will find there the Infant King.

The stop in the Holy City reveals much about the way God arranges events. As they seek their way the Wise Men announce the birth to Herod and Jerusalem. They who are pagans are the bearers of the good news of the coming of the Messiah, whom the King, the priests, and the people were expecting.

For the Wise Men, everything goes according to plan. They learn from the King the place of the birth, Bethlehem. God is faithful. They set off again. What would have happened if Herod, and with him all Jerusalem, had joined the caravan coming from the East? God had shed with abundance His light for things to turn out this way.

The priests, the scribes, those who knew the Scriptures to such an extent that they were able to find in them the place where the Messiah was to be born, will not set off. The coming of this child disturbs their daily routine, their plans, as if it seemed preferable to them to keep God imprisoned in their books, so as to avoid encountering Him face to face. They can speak of the Saviour, but they don't need Him. Very soon, Herod will even make the decision to get rid of Him, and order all children around Bethlehem two years old or under to be slaughtered, and they won't do anything to avoid this.

Reasons of state, public pressure, careerism, and the desire to remain in power, can blind both heart and soul. Don't let us fear to encounter God face to face. Every action of man is carried out before Him, the righteous Judge, the Sun of justice. But if everyone will eventually have to give an account of his words and deeds, everyone is above all called to encounter God's mercy.

And behold, the Wise Men arrive at the crib. They go in and fall down. Renewed by their encounter with the Divine Child, they won't be able but to go back by another way.

In the wake of the Wise Men or the shepherds, every man, whatever his situation may be, can set off, take a step towards the crib, and already encounter his Saviour. It is never too late, and the road is never ended. There is but one unforgivable sin: seeing the light and refusing it.

Entering the blessed time of the Jubilee means drawing near to Jesus, and asking ourselves the question whether our lives are consistent with so many gifts we have received. St. Augustine wrote:

g. *Confessions*,
X, 28³⁹.

But now since he whom Thou fillest is the one Thou liftest up,
I am a burden to myself, as not being full of Thee.^g

It is a certainty, the Child in the crib is able to fulfil our lives, to fulfil all lives. Won't He say later:

h. *Lk* 12:49.

I have come to cast fire upon the earth; and how I wish it were
already kindled!^h

To shine with the good news of the Gospel, we have first, and I would even say we have only, to live this good news. Then the glory of the Lord will rise over our lives. Then we shall be witnesses unto the ends of the earth, and many will see His star and will come and fall down before Him.

During this Jubilee year, may Mary be our guide. May she bring us forth to this other way which doesn't belong to this world, the radiant way of hope. God is with us, Emmanuel. Let us resolutely become *Pilgrims of hope*.

Amen. Alleluia.

