

Homily for Epiphany

Making a resolution

Apparently this is the day when most people who make a New Year's resolution break it. According to research asked for by Sheila's Wheels Car Insurance and printed in the Daily Mail six out of ten people will by the sixth day of the first month have given up their new year's resolutions. And what were they? According to a different set of research, asked for by myvouchers.co.uk and printed in the Independent the three most popular resolutions this year are: get fit at number three, get out of debt at number two and at number one: save more money. Sadly, there was no room in the top ten for a resolution which one parishioner emailed me; expressed in a prayer it goes like this: Dear God, my resolution for 2013 is a fat bank account and a thin body. Please don't let me mix them up like I did last year.

Whenever you make a resolution you have to motivate yourself. You have to be prepared to do things differently, be challenged and above all believe that your resolution is achievable. All of this you know but what you may not have stopped to think about is how many of these qualities we find in the wise men. They accept the challenge of the star which rises in the night sky and is interpreted as announcing a great birth. The wise men resolve to see this new born child, this infant king of the Jews. And in setting out they show a willingness to do things differently.

The wise men leave their normal routine for a journey which takes them a great distance. As they began it they may have heard their neighbours, perhaps even their relatives, mocking them wondering why on earth were they setting out on what might be a wild goose chase. The wise men clearly stayed resolute; they didn't give up; not six days or six weeks into their journey. They travelled on until the star halted over a particular place. There, as Matthew the evangelist proclaims, they saw the child with his mother Mary; falling to their knees they did him homage and offered him their gifts, for which they are best remembered, gold, frankincense and myrrh. And having achieved their goal they returned to their own country. In the wise men we have an example of how we might journey through the remaining three hundred and fifty nine days of this year. How as faith-travellers we might stay resolute and determined to achieve our goal of better seeing the Lord, the king, the shepherd of our souls.

Leaving aside resolutions such as saving more money or getting out of debt, perhaps we need to get spiritually fit. The wise men did this by doing things differently. If getting spiritually fit appeals to you then let me ask: what might you need to do?

Prayer is something many of us need to do differently. We struggle with it. I know this because whenever I hear confessions people are always admitting they don't pray anywhere near as much as they think they should. My advice on this is: be realistic. Monks and nuns who live in monasteries pray five times a day. That is their gift to the Church; it doesn't have to be everyone's gift. If your day is packed with other responsibilities, then pray when you can. And always begin with praise of God; how often we forget to praise the Lord for all that He has blessed us with, everything from the people we love to the water, food, clothing, housing, national peace and security and all else we in the UK take for granted. Once praise has been offered, when like the prophet Isaiah we have sung the praise of the Lord, then should our prayer move to telling God all that is on our mind. Pray when you can; it need only last ten minutes - to begin with. See where it leads you, see how it shapes you. Only from a regular life of prayer do we get spiritually fit.

The wise men did things differently and if you remember they didn't give up when challenged. On their long journey there may have been all sorts of challenges from sitting on a camel all day in the blistering heat to buying food they didn't recognise from people who didn't know them. The wise men rose to the challenge and in that respect we should learn from them. When we are challenged about our faith do we rise to meet it or do we agree with the challenger that yes, Christians are weird, church is boring and all wars start with religion? Talking about why we come here, what we gain from it, how our faith has helped us at different stages of life often allows people to whisper their admiration or to share something they wouldn't normally. By rising to the challenge of witnessing to our faith we may even become wise ourselves.

My friends, allow the example of the wise men to help you stay focussed on your relationship with God. Rise to the challenges of faith; do things differently and get spiritually fit. Epiphany means something which is revealed. Jesus Christ is revealed in word and sacrament, in grace and mercy. I can think of no greater resolution for us all than that this year we resolve to better see Him, hear Him, touch Him and share Him.