

Feast of the Epiphany

January 8, 2012

“Rise up in splendor Jerusalem! Your light has come!”

-First Reading

In December I visited the Mexican port town (15,000 residents) of Loreto in Lower California. It is there that the first of the California missions was established. This mission church is lovely, not elaborately adorned as some of its offspring churches in California, but charming in its simplicity. It was pre-Christmas there so the Three Kings were not to be found at the crib. However, they were *on the way*...each of them interspersed out in the main body of the church in sidewall niches. They were *on the way* to discover the radiant Christ just as we all are.

Today, on the Epiphany, they arrive at the crib. And there the inner beauty of Jesus is manifested to them. That is what epiphany means: a manifestation of inner beauty. Every epiphany, whether it is at the crib or elsewhere, has elements of inner beauty being manifested in a surprising manner.

For the book, *Finding God at the Old Ball Park*, I wrote a true story about my dad taking me to a big league ballpark for my first major league ball game. I titled it *Epiphany in Saint Louis*. And I described the emergence of my dad and me from a dark tunnel into the brightly lit green-carpeted arena of Sportsman's Park:

*“...there before me was a big league diamond flooded with bright lights for the night game. The infield was framed by red dirt, and sure enough, the infield was a vibrant green carpet that looked like it had never been stepped upon. Most of the stadium was painted a dark blue that contrasted beautifully with the closely cropped green grass.”*

For a 13 year-old this was a luminous sight. And then the players trotted out in spotless uniforms, and there beside them was the baseball legend, Connie Mack! For a boy who knew only the sandlots, this was the real thing! This was the big league!

*“As a teenager, I did not know what “epiphany” meant, but I do now. This experience was for me a hint of divine glory!”*

Well, getting back to today's feast, the squalid crib was turned into “big league” status when the Magi arrived. They were indeed big leaguers. They came resplendent in royal robes. Their presence is meant to remind us that the crib reveals both the human and the divine.

They had been drawn across the miles in their search for a beautiful savior. The Epiphany is all about beauty revealed in a very surprising locale. Who would expect to find it in a smelly stable?

It is not true that we are all allured by beauty. People magazine is all about the “beautiful people”.

And they all are glamorous, pretty, and attractive—at least on the surface. And we expect that.

But there is another kind of beauty that can emerge from ugly stable-like surroundings. Whether it is a stable or the garbage-strewn streets of Calcutta. Exhibit A: Mother Theresa. She would never make the cover of People Magazine for her physical beauty.

Bill Maher, the cynic, denigrated her by labeling her “an Albanian dwarf”. But others with eyes to see saw the real beauty that was there. Princess Diana, one of the world’s glamorous ones, honored her and was buried with a rosary gift from Mother Teresa.

And so the first reading today reminds us:

*“...darkness covers the earth, and thick clouds cover the peoples; (we can be blind to genuine beauty) but upon you the Lord shines and over you appears his glory.”*

Glory always means genuine beauty. Today is the feast of beauty. And each of us is a work of art that can reveal God’s beauty shining within us.

The Epiphany is about finding beauty in surprising and hidden places and persons. Even within ourselves. For our hearts are made for beauty! So were the hearts of the wise men. They were right in worldly goods – gold, frankincense, and myrrh – but longed for, searched for, and eventually found beauty manifested in the crib.

So, one last time, before Christmas is forgotten ‘til next year’s sales:

“Come all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant.  
Come ye, O come ye, to Bethlehem.  
Come and behold him,  
Born the King of Angels.”

Come with the Magi and behold his glory, his beauty, shining down through the ages.

**Breakfast Discussion:** “We can be blind to genuine beauty.” Where do we look for and where do we find genuine beauty?

**Personal Reflection:** How can I attain a more genuine beauty in this New Year?