

Pastoral Reflection
Epiphany

“Show me the Way” by Styx is a regular on my playlist and often part of my prayer time. I find it comforting and challenging because I consistently seem to be searching for deeper understanding and greater meaning every day of my life’s journey. I can’t be satisfied with superficial answers or milquetoast worldviews.

This song came to mind today as I reflected on the Gentile Magi setting out, guided by a star, to find the newborn king of the Jews. T.S. Eliot in his poem “The Journey of the Magi” suggests their journey was one of hardship and deprivation, of longing for the comforts and warmth of home, and “with the voices singing in our ears, saying that this was all folly.” Finally, they find the child, not in a palace, but in a stable. A strange king-to-be. Reflecting on their experience years later, they muse on whether this was a Birth or a Death. They returned to their places, their kingdoms, “But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation with an alien people clutching their gods.” They have been transformed – a kind of death. In spite of no longer fitting into their old world, the narrator says, “I should be glad of another death.”

Both the song and the poem speak to me of those incredible times when we have met God. We have no response but silence and awe. We may be walking on a trail, reading a book, praying in church, cooking supper, being drawn into a work of art, swimming, or gazing into the ocean. The setting or activity is not the cause. We become aware of God present to us in this time and place. The difficulties and struggles of our present every-day journey cease to be part of our consciousness. And we come away transformed, no longer able to simply return to the life before God’s encounter with us. A part of us has died and the new life, while it may be uncomfortable and disconcerting, calls for a deeper and genuine response to the God who found us and is calling us anew.

We listen to Matthew’s account of the Magi searching for the Christ-child. But the real story is that their search and our search is the under-story. The real story is that God who became human finds us, loves us, and calls us to love one another and all of creation.

May this feast of the Epiphany be a time for each of us to recall the epiphanies, the being found by God, in our own lives.

Note: St. Joseph Sr. Mary M. McGlone has an excellent article on this feast in the current NCR. If you want to read it on-line, you can go to National Catholic Reporter, menu, columns, Sunday Resources, or copy this into your browser: <https://www.ncronline.org/sunday-resource/jan-2-2022-epiphany-lord>

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