

“By a different way” - Epiphany

I remember well my first Christmas Holiday after my first term at university. I was insufferable. I found it very difficult to settle into the routines of home after the freedoms of college. Having seen how life would become, I could not return the same, though my attitude could have been much better.

I remember one of my Jesuit teachers in Rome once commenting on his use of water. He had spent some months in South America, in a place where water was scarce and had learnt, therefore, to use it sparingly. Now, teaching in the Eternal City, he continued to be careful not to waste water despite the plentiful supply. Having learnt the preciousness of water, he could not behave as he once did.

Anyone, who is alert to new places, people and experiences, will be changed by them. To grow, to mature, we must change. We may leave home one way but if we have been changed we shall return by a different way.

And so, though the way the wise men find the infant Jesus is striking - guided by a star - what is much more significant is how they return to their own country. Having followed a natural sign of the universe to a meeting with their Creator, they are changed by that meeting and so now open to Heaven, they allow their lives to be directed by God and they go back ‘by a different way.’ The wise men are us: they are the first gentiles, non-Jews, to worship Christ. But are we like them? Do we allow our meetings with Christ to change us?

I am thirty-six years old, nearly thirty-seven in fact, and I have been privileged to know for all those years that there is a God, that he loves me and cares for me, that his Son became man for me, that the Holy Spirit dwells within me and blesses me through the Sacraments, and I have been taught about love, forgiveness and all that makes us alive and complete. To put it another way: my life has been one of continual God-blessed opportunities. And yet how little I have changed! I have heard and seen much but remained stubbornly the same. Yet the wise men, they left Jesus to go back ‘by a different way.’ By Him, they were transformed.

Our religion is all for our good but perhaps like me, you often leave Mass with the same thoughts, plans and attitudes with which you came; on your way home from St Sabina’s you do not deviate from the path that brought you here. We had met Christ in our church but we didn’t allow him to change our way.

I remember one family holiday in New Zealand, which brought us to the King Country on the North Island. It is sparsely populated, there is little light pollution and so for the first time I saw the night sky in its magnificence; the

Milky Way floated above my head. It took my breath away. But the wise men knew that however spectacular stars may be, what matters is what they reveal below: a little baby boy, who began to change the world by first changing his visitors. When shall you and I begin to leave St Sabina's to return home 'by a different way?'