

SOLEMNITY OF THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD
JANUARY 5/6, 2019

Today's Gospel account of the visit of the Magi/Kings is very familiar to us. Familiar, too, are the traditional gifts these visitors from the East bring—gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Displayed in front of the Christmas icon is a small box containing examples of each of them. I believe each of us spiritually possesses these same gifts and today is invited to offer them to the Lord Jesus as an act of worship to be used by him through us for the work of building up the Kingdom of God in our world.

Gold. Traditionally, gold is an article of enduring value highly resistant to oxidation and corruption. It holds its value over long periods of time even as other commodities rise and fall. Among the types of assets listed in the Bible (e.g., precious metals, livestock, servants, gemstones, etc.), accumulation of gold was one of the chief measures of wealth. The gift of gold to Jesus was a tacit acknowledgement of his nature as God and king. St. Paul in today's second reading reminds us that he was given "stewardship of God's grace" for the purpose of his mission to share that gift with those who did not yet know Jesus. Is Jesus truly "Lord and King" of my life? To what use is each of us putting the grace of God, the "gold" of faith our spiritual gifts as well as our material gifts as well as the "gold" of our time and talent at his disposal?

Frankincense. Frankincense is produced by scraping the bark of certain native species of trees and then harvesting the beads of resin after they have dried. When burned, incense produces a strong and beautiful aroma. It has been used in worship since pre-Christian times. Using the lens of stewardship spoken about by St. Paul, what is the quality of the prayer I offer to God? Is my personal prayer and my participation at Mass like fragrant incense rising up in praise of God or is it merely out of obligation constantly checking my watch or i-phone until I can get on to the real focus of the day? Who or what is the god before whom I burn the incense of my worship? Is it God as revealed in the Scriptures, manifested in Jesus, indwelling in me through the Holy Spirit? Or have I created something or someone else as an idol, a god-substitute? Do I set time aside each day to be in communion, even if only for a few minutes, longer if my life circumstance permits, in raising up my heart and mind to God in prayer? To

quote Psalm 141: “ Lord, I call to you; hasten to me; listen to my plea when I call. Let my prayer rise like incense before you, God; my uplifted hands like an evening offering” (Ps. 141:1,2).

Myrrh. Myrrh, like frankincense, is a fragrant spice derived from the sap of a tree native to the Near East. It can be used as incense, but in the ancient world it also had wider usage as a perfume, an anointing oil, and was even imbibed as a medicinal tonic. Most notable with regard to Jesus’ life, myrrh was a key ingredient in a mixture of spices that were used to prepare his body for burial. The gift of myrrh acknowledges that through Jesus’ humanity God would reconcile the world to himself, would heal the wound of our original and personal sins to the point of taking upon himself our death. In being raised from the dead Jesus would bestow the anointing gift of the Holy Spirit into the hearts of all who are his disciples and so, in him, would raise our humanity to his heavenly glory. St. Paul will remind us on Ash Wednesday that we who have been healed of our sins and raised to new life in Christ have in him been made stewards of God’s reconciliation. (II Cor. 5:20-6:2). How generous am I in anointing others with the myrrh of forgiveness? Where and to whom is God calling me to pour out the myrrh of mercy into the wounds of family members, fellow parishioners, people and situations in our community and world? Like Jesus, “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor” (Lk. 4: 18).

As we recall the gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh offered so long ago, and our spiritual gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh we pray: ***“Accept, ...O Lord, our offerings, in honor of the appearing of your Only Begotten Son ...that to you praise may be rendered and eternal salvation be ours.”***