

Epiphany

SFX Friday 6th January 2022

Today was a special day in the history of the church. We buried a pope. Or to be more precise a pope buried a pope. That is rather unusual isn't it? And it happened because Pope Benedict when he felt old and tired resigned as pope. It had only happened once before in history. For this Benedict will be long remembered.

And it made me think of the first pilgrimage he made as pope, to Germany for the World Youth Day. I remember seeing him on the news sailing down the Rhine to greet the youngsters gathered there from all over the world. Youth days are wonderful experiences. I hope some of our youngsters will benefit from them.

I am recalling this because the great Cathedral in Cologne is in fact a shrine to the Magi. On this feast of the Epiphany, we think of the Magi going on a journey to greet the King of Kings and laying down their gifts. But I would like to recall a Pope going on that journey to Cologne to the shrine of the Magi. As well as greeting the young people Pope Benedict went to learn from the Magi. What does a pope learn from the Magi? And what do we learn from these strange exotic men.

I would like to share a little of what he said. He said:

"The new King, to whom they now paid homage, was quite unlike what they were expecting. In this way they had to learn that God is not as we usually imagine him to be. This was where their inner journey began. It started at the very moment when they knelt down before this child and recognized him as the promised King. But they still had to assimilate these joyful gestures internally.

They had to change their ideas about power, about God and about man, and in so doing, they also had to change themselves. Now they were able to see that God's power is not like that of the powerful of this world. God's ways are not as we imagine them or as we might wish them to be.

God is different - this is what they now come to realize. And it means that they themselves must now become different, they must learn God's ways.

They had come to place themselves at the service of this King, to model their own kingship on his. That was the meaning of their act of homage, their adoration. Included in this were their gifts - gold, frankincense and myrrh - gifts offered to a King held to be divine. Adoration has a content and it involves giving. Through this act of adoration, these men from the East wished to recognize the child as their King and to place their own power and potential at his disposal, and in this they were certainly on the right path.

By serving and following him, they wanted, together with him, to serve the cause of good and the cause of justice in the world. In this they were right.

Now, though, they have to learn that this cannot be achieved simply through issuing commands from a throne on high. Now they have to learn to give themselves - no lesser gift would be sufficient for this King. Now they have to learn that their lives must be conformed to this divine way of exercising power, to God's own way of being.

They must become men of truth, of justice, of goodness, of forgiveness, of mercy. They will no longer ask: how can this serve me? Instead, they will have to ask: How can I serve God's presence in the world? They must learn to lose their life and in this way to find it. Having left Jerusalem behind, they must not deviate from the path marked out by the true King, as they follow Jesus."

That is what a pope learned from the Magi.

Today we can remember that Pope Benedict didn't just preach this: he lived it.

As Pope he laid down his power the day he resigned. People can get addicted to power. We can in the small ways we treat people.

But we too can learn to give ourselves. Give ourselves to others, give our selves to God.

Let us begin by offering ourselves, our hearts to Christ the new-born King at this Eucharist.