

## HOMILETICS

**Solemnity of the Mother of God (Jan. 1)**

**Lk. 2, 16-21: Mary thought over events**

### *Happiness is a Challenge*

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A new year has just begun. You have been wishing your loved ones and friends a happy new year, and you have also been receiving a similar greeting. However, some people are inclined to ask: what is so happy about the new year? What is there to look forward to?

We are living in a time of "floating rate". A lot of people have suffered from recent disasters caused by floods and typhoons. Many have lost faith in the government. Our bright young people and countless professionals are leaving the country for greener pastures. Jeepney drivers are sick and tired of the "tong" being collected from them. Farmers are getting impatient with people who obstruct land reform. More and more young people are beginning to believe that violent revolution is the only effective way of obtaining much needed change. In the minds of many, our present society is hopeless.

So, what is so happy about the new year? Nothing... if you think of happiness as a kind of delectable food spoon-fed to you as you relax in bed... if you equate happiness with euphoria... if you are happy only when you indulge in egotism... if, for you, happiness is pleasure, and pleasure happiness.

But true happiness is something else. Happiness is the sense of achievement that makes you feel great after conquering a steep mountain. Happiness is the delight you feel in finding what you are looking for

— a bargain, or a lost boy, or a good apartment — after a long, arduous, and perhaps painful search. Happiness, in a word, is facing a challenge and being the better for it.

There is another definition of happiness, indicated by the Gospel today. Happiness is thinking about events and finding their salvific meaning. Mary thought deeply about the happenings surrounding the birth of Jesus. In doing so, she found their salvific meaning — and her happiness.

As we begin the new year, let us accept its challenge. We can do this best by following the example of Mary. Let us think about our life. Let us look for the direction being traced by God. And let us proceed in the name of the Lord.

I wish all of you a HAPPY NEW YEAR.

**EPIPHANY (Second Sunday after Christmas, Jan. 3)**  
**Mt 2, 1-12: Magi from the east worship the king.**

### *Who are the Kings?*

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Traditionally, we have celebrated the feast of the Epiphany on January 6. But now the Church transfers the feast on the Sunday nearest to January 6. This is done for practical reasons. In almost all countries today, January 6 is not a public holiday. If the Church would insist on obliging people to go to Mass and abstain from work under such a circumstance, many will not be able to comply with the obligation.

So, today, we celebrate the Epiphany. The popular name given to this feast is "three Kings". But this popular name is a misnomer. The visitors from the east are not called kings, but *Magi*, or men who studied the stars, wise men. Their number is not specified, so they could have

been three or five or ten — who knows? But this is not important. For the sake of little children, we can, perhaps, continue speaking about “three kings”. But grown ups should know better.

Today is actually the feast of Jesus Christ, the King of Kings, and all those who are kings with him. The Magi are only mentioned so that, like them, we might bring gifts to Jesus. You and I, united with Jesus Christ, are the true kings. The Second Vatican Council clearly says so: “the faithful are by Baptism, made one body with Christ... they are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic and kingly function of Christ” (Church, 31).

Long ago, God manifested the kingship of Jesus Christ by guiding wise men from the East to bring gifts to him. Nowadays, God wants to manifest the kingship of Christ through the action of Christians in the temporal sphere:

*“The laity must take on the renewal of the temporal order as their own special obligation. Led by the light of the gospel and the mind of the Church, and motivated by Christian love, let them act directly and definitively with other citizens, using their own particular skills and acting on their own responsibility. Everywhere and in all things they must seek the justice characteristic of God’s kingdom. The temporal order must be renewed in such a way that, without the slightest detriment to its own proper laws, it can be brought into conformity with the higher principles of Christian life and adapted to the shifting circumstances of time, place and person. Outstanding among the works of this type of apostolate is that of Christian social action. This sacred Synod desires to see it extended now to the whole temporal sphere, including culture.” (Laity, 7; see also 13, and Church, 36).*

Let children celebrate the feast of “three kings” with their parties and games, but let grown-ups celebrate the Epiphany, the manifestation of Jesus, the new-born king. Let us do this by renewing today our baptismal pledge to christianize the temporal order.

Sunday after Epiphany (Jan. 10)  
Feast of the Baptism of our Lord  
Year III: Lk. 3,15-16. 21-22

### *Thou shalt not Drown*

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We fail to appreciate the importance of water until we open the faucet and nothing comes out. We fail to appreciate the importance of clean air until exhaust gases make us dizzy. Yet, how long can we live without water? Only a few days. How long can we live without air? Only a few minutes.

Water and air are vital to us. So, it should be quite normal for S. Scripture to use these vital elements as symbols. Water symbolises the external and air or spirit the internal element of our sanctification. Of the two, as in the natural order, the spirit is more important. Yet, somehow, people get confused. Many have the impression that the external element, symbolized by water, is more important.

Recently, someone wrote an article in the *Government Report* condemning the Catholic Church in the Philippines for failing to achieve social reform. Now who's talking? The social and economic welfare of the people is primarily an affair of the government, and only secondarily an affair of the Church. The attack is all the more unjust, because in many areas the Church is doing its part, but the government is not. Take away the schools, hospitals, associations of the Church; take away the social work and self-help projects initiated by the Church, and what have you? By and large, the Church, in spite of its limited resources, has performed better than the government, which has much more resources at its disposal.

For the perfection of man, that the Church wants to achieve, concern for the temporal order is as important as water is for human life. Nevertheless, there is something more important. Air is more vital than water. One must first breathe, then one can seek water. If he has

water all around him but cannot breathe, he would be a drowning man. Christians must take care not to drown.

Just as man needs air more urgently than water, the Church, in its renewal, must first seek to secure its internal element, the Spirit, before it can hope to be effective in the temporal order. "The mission of the Church concerns the salvation of men, which is to be achieved by belief in Christ and by His grace. Hence the apostolate of the Church and of all her members is *primarily* designed to manifest Christ's message by words and deeds and to communicate His grace to the world. This is done mainly through the ministry of the Word and the sacraments, which are entrusted in a special way to the clergy. But the laity too have their very important roles to play if they are to be "fellow-workers for the truth" (3 Jn. 8). It is especially on this level that the apostolate of the laity and the pastoral ministry complement one another." (Vatican II, Laity, 6).

The gospel reading today, which narrates the inauguration of Jesus as the Messiah, gives us the right focus on his messianic work. Not water, but the Spirit, is emphasized. Jesus' principal work is to give us the Spirit, the breath of life. Let us not drown in the waters of temporal matters, but let us stretch out our hands to Christ, so that he can fill us with his Spirit and make us his effective co-workers in saving mankind.

**Third Sunday of the year (Jan. 17)**  
**Year III: Jn 2, 1-12, The Marriage at Cana**

### *Blind Date*

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Four young gentlemen went out on a blind date with four young ladies. Of the four young men, one stood out as the most charming, witty, talented, very likely to succeed in life. We really can't blame the four young ladies for taking a liking for him. But the date was never repeated. The girls happened to think of marriage as a lasting union

between man and woman. The young man who showed himself as a very nice companion, happened to have a different idea.

The young man said he did not believe in marriage. He was very frank. He said he had been in love. He and his loved one lived together for some time, until they got tired of one another, often quarreled, and finally went their separate ways. "Why bind yourself to a miserable life," he said. "Isn't it better to live together while you are in love and separate when you are no longer in love?"

The young man's argument sounded very good. But, instinctively, none of the girls allowed herself to be convinced. Man-woman relationship for them means not only having a lover, but also a father for their children. They know that the children will need not only their father's support but his love and care even more. Their intuition told them that the young man's love is selfish and cannot be the basis of lasting happiness.

But doesn't the young man have a good point? Suppose two persons fall in love and marry. Then they get disenchanted with one another and find misery instead of happiness in each other's company. Shall we condemn them to a marriage without love?

Well, my dear friends, I frankly admit that such a situation is met with in real life. But does it really provide an argument for abolishing marriage and establishing so called "free love"? It only warns people to take marriage seriously. Many people who invest their money get bankrupt. But this is not an argument against investment. It only serves as a warning to invest wisely, taking precautions against bankruptcy.

One can still insist that, after all guarantees for success have been taken, marriage is still a risk. I agree. Marriage is always a blind date. Faith is necessary if marriage is to exist at all. The wine of love that abounds and seems inexhaustible during courtship might suddenly dry up a few months or a few years after the wedding ceremony. Marriage usually puts an end to romance.

But romance is not the only brand of love. There is a better brand that we might call intersubjective love. Its seat is not in the emotions, although it is far from cold. It is not merely intellectual, although the

mind has a great part to play in it. Nor is it just the result of will power, although one has to want it. Intersubjective love unites the very core of two beings, that innermost reality that makes a human being not just a bundle of emotions or an intellect or a will, but a PERSON. It is the love which is a revelation of self and at the same time the acceptance of another person revealing himself.

Marriage as a sacrament, a contract "in Christ", is open to intersubjective communion. Since Christ has been invited to the wedding, there is no need to worry even when the wine of romantic love is consumed. From the water of domestic quarrels and problems — which strangely reveal the true self of spouses to one another — he produces the exquisite wine of lasting intersubjective love.

**Fourth Sunday of the year (Jan. 24)**

**Lk. 1,1-4; 4,14-21: Scripture is fulfilled**

### *The Bitter and the Better*

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There are two kinds of poor people: the bitter poor and the better poor.

The bitter poor live in shaky shanties we call *barong-barong*, if they live anywhere at all. They eat only one meal a day, if you can call it a meal. Their clothes are always dirty, if you can call them clothes. They have been the victims of injustice, greed, lust for power, or lack of love.

To the bitter poor one cannot at once preach the Gospel of Salvation. One must begin by preaching and practising the good news of human solidarity and justice. To preach this gospel one need not be a Messiah. It is enough to be a man conscious of the duties of human dignity.

The better poor come from all walks of life. Most of them, of course, have just enough or barely enough to live a decent life. But

there are some who have material wealth, who nevertheless belong to the better poor. For poverty is not just lacking things. Both a rich man and a poor man can be hungry. But the rich man knows that he can get good food, while the poor man knows he can get only little food or none at all. *Poverty is knowing one's inability to satisfy his needs.*

If one knows that he is in need of salvation, and knows that he will be unable to save himself, then he is spiritually poor. But he should not become spiritually bitter. He should look to Christ — the Saviour. He should listen to the good news — that Jesus has come to save us.

The better poor are better than the bitter poor because they have HOPE. They are better than all other people because they hope for SALVATION, and Christ himself came to fulfill this hope.

Christ preached both to the bitter poor and to the better poor. However, he concentrated in preaching to the better poor. His plan was to make the better poor his cooperators in uplifting the bitter poor.

We, as christians, belong to the better poor. This means that the upliftment of the bitter poor is our task: we have to show them human solidarity and justice, and thereby prepare them for the Gospel of Salvation. Then, we can bring Christ, the Good News, to them. Our task is to help them cease to be bitter and begin to be better.

**Efren Rivera, O.P.**