

## Fr Ryan Homily 1-7-24 - Epiphany

Read: Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72; Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6; Matthew 2:1-12

Something that I have just noticed with us as people over time, so often it isn't enough to be somewhere, to go to a place, we wanna enter in. Here's what I mean when someone wants to see the ocean, travel there, go there, you don't just wanna stand on the beach and look, you wanna dive in – you wanna swim. I went to the Grand Canyon one time so beautiful, majestic, but it wasn't enough just to see it. I was like I wanna see how far down I can get if I can make it to the bottom and come back up. Warning going down is much easier than coming back up so just be careful with that. But I didn't just wanna go there, I wanted to experience the Grand Canyon. Grand Canyon – impressive but I wanna do something there. Same with your favorite band or musician, you don't have to go to their concert to hear their music – you have your phone, your radio, whatever -but sometimes you just wanna be part of it. You wanna sing with them as they're singing up on stage. So not just having the sense of I wanna be there, I wanna do something when I'm there. Both of those are good and we need to understand this because the error falls in when we emphasize one to the exclusion of the other. We know there are people who are overworked and it's all about doing, doing, doing and they have to be reminded we are human beings not human doings. Yes 100%. At the same time while we are human beings, we have been made to do. Literally the way that God made us is do and we do a lot of things. He made us to create, He made us to build and to work, so many things. The biggest thing God ever made us for is at the heart of our identity and actually it's at the heart of His identity. The biggest thing God ever made us to do is to love. When someone can be in love with another person, what a gift, but to choose to love that is also a gift. So while we're called human beings we are called to do many things and the primary thing we are called to do, we are called to love. Because to love, and the church has reiterated this over and over again, to love is to will the good of the other. So whether I love a stranger or my mom or a friend, spouses love each other. Not just feelings of affection or romance, it's choosing to do something. Choosing to will the good of that person and that is massive, that is how we love. So when it comes to God we are made to love God above everything, above everyone. We're made to love God, but the question is if love is willing the good of the other, how do I love God? God is goodness itself. If I love Him, if I will His good – like I can't

increase His goodness, I can't give Him more. How do I love God? Well we're told we can love Him in three ways. First in the Bible, it's actually St John who says this, we love God by taking care of people. We love God by taking care of people who need our help, who need our attention. When we love them we are loving God. That's one. We love God by loving the people we see. The second way we love God, we love God by obeying Him. Jesus said this you can't claim to love God and not obey His commandments. So if I ever wonder do I really love God, I don't just look at how I'm feeling, I look at how I'm acting. Am I choosing to obey Him? And then the third way that we can love God, it's actually an extension of obeying Him, we love God when we worship God. We love God when we worship God as He has asked us to worship Him. And this is the key thing, we love God when we obey God by worshiping God the way He's asked us to worship Him. And I know I've said this before, I'll say it again, today as we're celebrating the Feast of the Epiphany the heart of our religion is not our creed that we profess, the things that we believe thought the creed is really important. The heart of our religion is not the moral life. It's not service though the moral life and service are very important. The heart of our religion is worship. The heart of any religion is to worship, and the heart of worship is not feelings, it's not offering whatever. The heart of worship is always gonna be sacrifice, giving up something. The heart of worship is sacrifice. Then the heart of what it is to love God is sacrifice. Why am I going through all this on a day like today, this Feast of the Epiphany? Cause what do you have, the Feast of the Epiphany is the first people who ever worshiped Jesus Christ incarnate on this earth. We have the Magi and they travelled from afar, a sacrifice, to go from where they lived, and they bring Jesus gifts. Right these valuable gifts and they offer those gifts. That too is a sacrifice. Because the heart of God is worshiping Him, and the heart of worship is sacrifice. That's what the Magi are doing. Remember when COVID happened, it changed so many things we know. And there was the period of time where no one could come to mass. It was a painful time for so many Catholics. And I think we all notice now that mass is in person again that mass is not what it used to be. And there's several reasons for that. I think some were just looking for a reason to split and they found one. COVID gave them that. But I think for others they just got into the habit of virtual mass. It was okay for awhile so it must be okay now. Some people have even come up to me and said sometimes I like to do mass with coffee and slippers. And I tell them that's not okay -right we know that's not okay. Right that's not okay. And

they're always, they say something like well I know, the point of mass is you need to receive the Eucharist and you can't receive the Eucharist unless you're there in person. The Eucharist is beautiful but just so we're clear folks the Eucharist is not why we come to mass. I mean it's essential, one of the greatest gifts we have is the Eucharist that comes out of mass – absolutely. Jesus said unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood you don't have life. He made that very clear. Absolutely clear to receive the Eucharist – I'm not going to deny that. The point of the mass is not to receive the Eucharist. The point of mass is to offer the sacrifice of the Son to the Father because the mass is the Last Supper and Calvary brought together here in our presence. That's the point. The whole point is watching that and to love God through that. Which means the whole point of our lives is to go to mass. The point of our lives is to offer the greatest sacrifice any of us could every possibly hope or even imagine we could be part of. That's why the Feast of the Epiphany is all about worship and it's all about sacrifice. It's about what we do here every single Sunday and every single day in so many of our Catholic churches. And so we recognize something else along with that. I am not loving God if I know He's asked me, commanded me in fact, to do this in memory of Him - Jesus offering Himself in union with the ministerial priest to the Father - and I stay away. Because we have been created, we have been designed to love and the one we're called to love above anyone else is God Himself. And the way He has asked us to love Him yes in serving our brothers and sisters and yes obeying His commandments, but this particular commandment – do this in memory of Me. It's a critical thing and that makes all the difference in the world. It makes all the difference in the world, but the question is does it make a difference in my life? Here's what I mean. I think a lot of times we show up to mass and we leave unchanged. We leave mass and we leave the same way we walked into mass. This is supposed to make all the difference in the world, but it doesn't even make a difference in my life. And maybe for some it's because our approach is always but then I didn't expect anything to change. I didn't know it was supposed to change me. I know I'm supposed to go to mass and so I do, I check the box, and I go home. But how could we come in contact and encounter the true and living God and not be somewhat changed by that. In fact the Magi, what does it say. They offered their gifts, gold, frankincense and myrrh. They were warned in a dream, so they departed for their home by another way. And I gotta tell ya saints and people in the church, theologians, have read that for these 2,000 years and said yes that

is exactly what is supposed to happen. I came to the Lord one way and then I worshiped Him and then I had to go home a different way. I couldn't go back the same person that I was after I had walked into the Lord's presence. So why do we? Why do we do that? If this is supposed to make all the difference in my life, why doesn't it? I think part of it is because you might be missing two things. First I think we're missing out on the reality that we are here to sacrifice. This is all about sacrifice. We forget or maybe we just never knew that the heart of worship is sacrifice. That what happens here, we are witnessing the Son being offered to the Father for the life of the world. If we don't see that in a spiritual way, well of course we leave unchanged. That's the first thing we might be missing. But the second is this, you don't travel to the ocean to stand on the beach, you dive in. Seeing the Grand Canyon, so cool. Hike the Grand Canyon you're different afterwards. You attend that concert, it's fun for a while. You get called on stage by the band to sing with them, changes your life. Same thing is true when you come to mass. You are not here to watch. We're not here to just be here, we're here to do something. We're here to join in. So remember the three gifts of the Magi – gold, frankincense, and myrrh – each of them represents something different. The last one, myrrh, it's a substance with a very bitter taste. Myrrh means bitter and it was given to Jesus at His birth to foreshadow His death, His burial. Because at the Last Supper, at Calvary, at mass, Jesus is not just the one offering the sacrifice, Jesus is the sacrifice. And so are you. Every mass so are you. In fact we even pray it in the Eucharistic Prayer. Lord make of us an eternal offering to you. Let our lives be a gift. If I go to mass and I leave unchanged it's probably because I didn't offer anything. If I go to mass and I leave the same way I walked in it's because I didn't offer myself. I didn't give Him anything. Well what do you mean give Him? I mean I didn't give Him what I was afraid of, I didn't give Him what I love, I didn't give God access to my hopes or access to my weakness's. I didn't give God anything I just showed up and watched. But you are not baptized to show up and watch. Jesus Christ did not show up on this earth so you could show up and watch. He didn't die, He didn't give us His flesh in the Eucharist, or send His Holy Spirit to fill us so you could show up at mass at watch. He did those things so we could unite our lives and our sacrifices to His life and to His sacrifice. He did this so that every time we approach Him here we would be changed. So that every time we walked into church, offered the sacrifice with the priest, with Jesus Himself we would be different. We would become more like Jesus, and we could never return home in

the same way. We go back home but every time we go back home by a different way.

Amen