

Where Do We Find the King?

It's been said that wise men studied the stars to find the new-born king and when they found him they brought symbolic gifts and worshipped him. We celebrate this event as Epiphany, the manifestation of God not just to the Jews but to the entire world.

Where is God manifested today and how do we find him? What signs do we look for? How will we recognize him? What gifts will we bring? In what ways will we worship and love him? My experience tells me that God surprises us in unexpected places and many of these are beyond the doors of the church.

This was obvious to me so many times in my work as an addictions counselor. I found God loving and working in one of the last places people would expect and I stood in awe of God's mercy and power. There was so much goodness it often overwhelmed me.

I remember telling alcoholics and addicts that everyone comes to earth with a special gift to bring and we are all poorer without it. Many were still coming out of the fog of detox and beginning to confront the mess they had made of their lives and relationships. How could they possibly have anything of value to offer to anyone? And yet as they had the courage to begin the journey of recovery they discovered they really did have gifts and these gifts made a difference in their lives and the lives of those around them.

Last year I was part of a "call in" where people who were most likely to engage in violence or be victims of violence were ordered by their parole officers to attend a meeting to offer them a way out of the drug and crime lifestyle they were living. One of the speakers was a former drug dealer who had taken them up on that offer. He said he realized he had to make a change when he was stopped by police at his home shortly before his daughter was due home from school. He didn't want her to see him in handcuffs. It was time to change. It wasn't easy but his love of his child became the gift that started his life in a new direction. He said that he now had a steady honest job, was a coach, and "didn't have to look over my shoulder to see if the police were following me." Along the way, he also discovered that he had gifts of encouragement and leadership.

There's a parishioner I visit regularly who has the gift of hospitality. Often when I stopped by I found relatives in need of a place to stay. She shared the little she had generously with them. Another homebound parishioner frequently calls with ideas for parish ministries. She may no longer be able to be physically

involved, but her gift of suggestions reminds us of that our church family isn't just those who are able to pray with us on Sundays. We have others who pray with us in their pain and limitedness.

There's a 92-year-old woman who lives in the neighborhood who takes elderly people to doctors' appointments and helps them when they need a hand around the house. She does it humbly because she is able—no thanks expected. A parishioner who recently died continued to knit hats for cancer patients even when she was very ill. Another parishioner who loved St. Leo's and was encouraged by the influx of children into the parish made sure his wife promised to have Easter candy for them even as he was dying.

When I worked as a therapist with children, many of whom



experienced severe poverty and abuse, I often saw courage and heroism in them and in their family members. I remember relatives of one young girl who had experienced many horrors in her short life excitedly telling me they had moved and found a house with a yard. They invited me to come. The house was old and worn with floors sagging from years of use. Pollution from nearby factories poured in through the windows. It was so much better than the last place they had lived they told me and proudly opened the back door to show off the "yard," a small area of broken concrete. I thought of the stable in

Bethlehem. God was there. Love was overflowing and that humble house became a palace built by gifts of determination, hope, and love.

Our refugees and immigrants bring gifts of faith, trust in God, and community. How else could they have embarked on journeys to an unknown and uncertain future? Many have experienced terrors we couldn't begin to imagine in their pilgrimages here. Even when things seemed impossible, they continued on certain of God's presence with them. The adults continue to struggle with physically-trying low-paying jobs but they don't complain. Life is better for their children. Even though he was currently let go from his job, one father told me "I am not rich. I am not poor. God gives me all I need." I don't know if I could have had such faith.

No need to look for stars. They are in our midst in the lives of those around us. God is here. God is present. God is active. And we worship by loving service to each other. We each have God-given gifts to bring. And we all are truly enriched by our sharing them.

"Jesus wants to give this wisdom in abundance. He will surely crown your efforts to sow seeds of healing and reconciliation in your families, communities and the wider society of this nation. Does He not tell us that His wisdom is irresistible? His message of forgiveness and mercy uses a logic that not all will want to understand, and which will encounter obstacles. Yet His love, revealed on the cross is ultimately unstoppable. It is like a spiritual GPS that unfailingly guides us towards the inner life of God and the heart of our neighbor."

— Pope Francis

