

Epiphany 2010 C

I. New Years day I had my traditional family party at the rectory. My friend Father Gasper Genuardi came and gave me a gift. It was a handmade box containing gold, frankincense and myrrh which fascinated my family. Legend has it that gold was the gift of Melchior, a king from Arabia and the oldest of the three. Frankincense was given by Balthazar , a king of Saba, present day Yemen. It was made from the sap of Boswellia tree which grows on the slopes of the Arabian Sea and was regarded as precious as gold. Lastly Myrrh was given by Caper, Fr. Genuardi's namesake, king of Tarsus in present day Turkey.

II. The ancient Fathers of the Church saw the significance of the gifts immediately. Gold for a Monarch; Frankincense for a God...but Myrrh? Myrrh was either used as pain-killer when mixed with wine or an embalming agent. Eastern Rite Christians tend to think that we romanticize Christmas-in a sense leaving the baby in the crib. The Mystery is that the Baby grew up and died on a Cross. The Apocryphal gospel, which never were accepted by the Church, but nevertheless a key to popular piety in those early days pictures the child Jesus making small crosses from the wood shavings in Joseph's carpenter shop-puts little bit of reality into the story.

III. T.S. Eliot put the significance of the story of the Three Kings rather well in his poem "The Journey of the Magi".

hAll this was a long time ago, I remember,

This set down

We were led all this way for

Birth or Death?

We had thought them different; this Birth was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.

Epiphany is a time to take a second look at Christmas.
As Hugh of St. Victor, one of the Ancient Fathers, said
"Love is the eye!" If you look at anything through the
eyes of love, you see it correctly and appreciate the
Mystery. But if you look with a cynical, jealous, or
bitter eye, you neither see correctly or treasure the
Mystery. As another of the old Eastern Church writers
said "Run with the Star, and carry your gifts with the
Magi, gold and frankincense and myrrh, as to a King,
and to God, and to One who has died for your.