

Solemnity of the Epiphany - We are all Wise Men and Women giving Homage to the Lord January 3, 2021.

Last Sunday we watched a 1985 movie “**The Fourth Wise Man**” (<https://youtu.be/82IEsYdPh64>) based on the novel by Henry Van Dyke, an American author, educator and clergyman (1852-1933). This was our second time watching it. The story is an expansion of the account of the Biblical Magi, recounted in the Gospel of Matthew in the New Testament. Artaban is a young Magus (Wise Man) who desires to follow the star to the birthplace of the coming King, against the counsel of his friends and family. Artaban (Martin Sheen) and his reluctant servant Orontes (Alan Arkin) set off to join the caravan of the three other wise men. Like the other Magi, Artaban from Persia sees signs in the heavens proclaiming that a King had been born among the Jews. Like them, he sets out carrying treasures, a sapphire, a ruby, and a "pearl of great price" to give to the child. However, he stops along the way to help a dying man, which makes him late to meet with the caravan of the other three wise men. Because of that, he is forced to sell one of his treasures to buy the camels and supplies necessary for the trip. He then commences his journey but arrives in Bethlehem too late to see the child, whose parents have fled to Egypt. While in Bethlehem, he uses another one of his treasures to bribe the Roman soldiers so as to save the life of a baby from the massacre.

Artaban travels to Egypt and many other countries, searching for Jesus for many years and performing acts of charity along the way. He ends up helping a leper colony, healing people with leprosy, helping to build an irrigation system so people can sow seeds and harvest their own food. His good friend Tigranes from Persia came telling him his dad passed away and tried to persuade him to go home, but he decided to stay to help the colony instead. After 33 years, Artaban is still a pilgrim and a seeker. Then one day, a blind leper he healed from high fever came back to the colony and showed people he could see because of a man called Jesus who can make the blind see, the crippled walk and lepers clean. Artaban, like seeing the star, immediately knew Jesus was the King. So he went to Jerusalem but only in time for the crucifixion of Jesus. He overheard Peter's denial of Jesus, the screaming of Jesus during the scourging and crowning of the thorns. During all these, he noticed the Roman soldiers killed Tigranes and tried to sell his daughter Shameir into slavery. He spent his last treasure, the pearl, to ransom Shameir. With his ill health, he could only witness the Crucifixion from a distance and heard Jesus' final words: “**Father, into your hands I commit my spirit**”

He parted with the last hope of finding the King. The quest was over and he thought he had failed and wasted his life in a foolish quest. He had no more gift to pay homage to the King. So he and Orontes travelled back to the colony. Midway, he was tired, lying down, he said, “I am thirsty.” Then in the following scenes, we saw the back of a man approached Artaban and talked to him. This is the climax and finale of the movie and I don't want to spoil it. I highly recommend this 72 minutes movie. If you can't wait to the end, the climax is at the last five minutes. Artaban died peacefully. Before he died he said to Orontes, “Did you hear? Orontes, did you see? **We have found the King. And he found me. He has accepted all the gifts.**”

The Magi's journey across mountains and deserts, following the star, echoes in our hearts. We have our own star to follow. We are all seekers of meaning, truth and happiness in our lives, each individually and unique in our own ways. When the magi saw the infant Jesus, they saw not just a child but God's light that had come into the world. We too have been given the eyes of faith to keep us on course as we follow Christ along the highways and by-ways of life, across the desert paths of loneliness, pain, failure and illness. The three Wise men and including the fourth in the movie represent all of us on a spiritual adventure which goes on as long as life lasts. We are to be Wise Men of our day, making Jesus visible to the whole world as its Saviour and Redeemer. We recognize that he is infinitely greater than any president or

prime minister or any other ruler. We recognize that He is our Lord, the one who governs our lives. We hold our hands together in prayer, placing our hands in his and surrendering to him. The Lord needs our commitment in furthering his work. Just as the Wise-men did not come empty-handed, we too must bring our gift of self to help build the kingdom of this Great King. We pay homage to the Lord in more than our gesture of prayer. We pay homage to him in the events of our lives, be they significant events or the routine daily events. The magi were wise men. They made two journeys: one to Bethlehem to pay homage and then a different route home. We are all making a journey home through life and hopefully paying homage to God in our daily ordinary and unique ways. Having found Bethlehem, let us hope that at the end of life's journey we will be met once more by Jesus. This is what Christmas is all about. **Jesus, the spiritual become physical, draws us, the physical, into union with the spiritual. Our lives have meaning and purpose and truth and beauty when they reflect His Life.**

And so we do Him homage. We entrust our lives to Him. And we pray to Him to lead us to that place where our hearts long to go, in union with God. Our presence and our life are a testimony of the Lord's work and of his love because we are a gift for others. What do you have to offer and share with your brothers and sisters? What do you want to put into play today to serve others? Take a moment now to join the Lord in prayer. Pope Francis tells us that "**Life, the simple fact that we exist, opens humanity's heart to prayer...The beauty and mystery of Creation create in the human heart the first impulse that evokes prayer.**" Stop doing what we are doing for a minute, be silent and admire everything that exists and that we can contemplate. Be grateful for the beauty of the day, of the people, of the events that we have experienced. Prepare to admire the good of what remains today, and days to come.

As for those who are earnestly wondering what's the conversation between the stranger and Artaban the Fourth Wise Men on that day which might happen to us all the time— the answer is in Matthew 25:35-40.