



Sunday Reflection With Fr. Rafal

Dear St. Joseph Parishioners and Visitors,
Have a Blessed and Happy 2024!!

The Gospel of today mentions The Magi who were early astronomers. They represent men of science through the ages who went from natural wonder to faith in God. Science can open up vistas that lead to faith. That's what we see in our Gospel: *"And behold, the star that they had seen at its rising preceded them, until it came and stopped over the place where the child was...they saw the child with Mary his mother. They prostrated themselves and did him homage."*

They brought gifts for the child - wonderful gifts (gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh). Today I'd like to tell you about the three other presents. I'm indebted to Bishop Bob Barron for this. Bishop Barron took the old question: If a genie appeared to you and said you could have three wishes, what would you ask for? He responded that the first and most essential gift is **faith**. Here's the logic:

Without faith one's world would be very small - like living your life in broom closet. For example, I know about the galaxies, not because I have seen them but because I believe the scientists. They also tell about subatomic particles: electrons and protons, bosons and six types of quarks. I've never seen them, but I take their word for it. Faith. Similarly, I know about Abraham Lincoln because I believe historians. And even though I've never travelled to China, I'm certain that country exists. How? Because I accept the converging testimony of others. Just so, I know about Jesus because I trust the Bible and believe the testimony of his early followers. And I have the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit. Faith - not an irrational faith, but a considered faith - takes a person out of a tiny, self-enclosed world.

From faith flows a second gift - **hope**. By hope life has meaning - it's not just some random process. In the morning it's worthwhile getting out of bed, if a person has hope. This world is a valley of tears: always was and always will be. For sure life has wonderful moments, but overall, no matter how much money and good health a person has, this earthly life is like St. Theresa of Avila describes it - a bad night in a bad inn. Ultimately only hope keeps a person moving forward.

Faith and hope open a person to the greatest gift - **love**. Love builds on faith and hope. Love makes life bearable. Without love, life is what Hobbes described: a war of all against all. Love, however, involves forgiveness, patience, forbearance, thoughtfulness. St. Paul says, *"love hopes all thing."* Love wants the best for each person - their eternal salvation. St. Paul sums it up this way: *"These three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."*

Speaking of love, I'm thankful for the affection you have shown me in 2023. I cannot repay you, but I do pray for each one of you. I ask God that like the Magi - those Wise Men - a star will lead you to Jesus, that you will give Jesus your best gift. And receive from him three presents. They are presents that no one can purchase, only ask the Holy Spirit for them in the New Year 2024: **faith, hope and love**.

Fr. Rafal Ligenza.

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