THE STAR OF FAITH AND TODAY'S HERODS

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In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Dear faithful, today's Gospel shows us the three kings who come to Bethlehem to pay homage to the Word made flesh, the Lord of heaven and earth, who today reveals Himself to all men. As the Introit of the Holy Mass describes it: "Behold, the Lord the Ruler is come: and the kingdom is in His hand, and power, and dominion."

And surely we have wondered more than once where these three kings actually came from, what the beginning of their journey toward the true God looked like. They were certainly men of exceptional standing, well-educated kings, men of means, who enjoyed respect in their kingdoms. Yet when they saw the sign of the star in the sky, they began to seek its meaning. When they came to the conviction that they must leave behind their whole life up to then and set out on a journey toward an unknown God, they were ready to do it.

And we can imagine that this decision of theirs, humanly speaking apparently mad, met with incomprehension, perhaps with mockery and derision. But they did not heed what people would think, what people would say. They longed to know the true God. What great courage it must have taken to set out on this journey, to answer this call, to set off through unknown lands toward an unknown God. Though within arm's reach they had hundreds, thousands of pagan idols, they knew perfectly well that all of them were a lie, a delusion. They longed to know the true God.

Dear faithful, today, as we pay homage to the three kings, as we recall the adoration they offered to the divine Child, we must realize that one cannot seek the true God and at the same time stand still. One cannot, my dear ones, expect the Lord God to hand everything to us on a plate. Each of us is called to set out on the same journey that the three kings made 2000 years ago. And on this journey each of us, like them, is not alone. A supernatural star accompanies each of us. A star that shows the way to the true God. A star that God Himself gives us, who reveals Himself, who desires to bring every man to Himself.

THE STAR AND IDOLS

And we hear in the Gospel how greatly the three kings rejoiced, with exceeding great joy, as the Evangelist wrote, when they saw the star that led them to the true God. And we can imagine with what great zeal they gazed at the light of this star, not turning their eyes away from it even for a moment.

My dear ones, and how do we treat this star, this light that the Lord God gives us? The light of the Catholic religion, whose supernatural brightness leads us, after all, to the knowledge of the true God. So often we do not know the truths of the religion of Christ, because we do not even try to learn them. So often we are religious ignoramuses. We close our eyes to the brightness that shows the way to heaven, and we wander astray, plunged in darkness.

Dear faithful, do Catholics living in the twentieth century differ from the pagans who mocked the three kings seeking God? Hardly, for we too live comfortably in the shadow of the pagan idols of the modern world. We Catholics too are not ready to set out on a journey toward the true God. We too are more concerned about what people will say, what they will think. We too are not ready to sacrifice anything for the Lord Jesus. And what good is it that, as we hear in the Preface of today's Holy Mass, "when Thine only-begotten Son appeared in our mortal nature, He gave us anew the light of His immortality," if we flee from this light given to us anew and prefer to live in darkness like pagans.

Yesterday I went shopping. Somewhere in the shop there was a radio programme on in the background, debates about the weather. "How good that we have snow." And the host laments: "Oh dear, what a misfortune, because a generation would grow up that

does not know snow. What a great misfortune!" But is it not a far greater misfortune that another generation is growing up that does not know God? But over that, my dear ones, there is no one left to lament.

ANOTHER WAY HOME

My beloved, today we wish to join the three kings. No matter how long our journey lasts, no matter how many adversities we shall have to face, we know perfectly well that the star of our holy Catholic religion, if only we faithfully follow its light, will let us reach the longed-for goal. It will let us know the true God.

And we heard in today's Gospel that "entering the house, they found the Child with Mary His Mother, and falling down, they adored Him." And as a sign of our sharing in the adoration offered to the divine Child, we too have bent our knees. May we bend our knees before the Lord God not only once a year, not only on a great feast, but may we bend our knees before the true God, before our Saviour, as often as possible, and bring Him our gifts: the gold of a living faith, the myrrh of sincere hope, and the incense of a love for God and neighbour burning within us.

Dear faithful, today's Gospel also contains a very important warning. We hear that "having received an answer in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they went back another way into their own country." Another way, because he who has come to know the true God can no longer walk the same road he has walked in his life until now. He who has come to know the true God must change the ways of his life. He who has come to know the true God must also be aware that the true God has here on earth a whole host of enemies: those who hate Him, those who would like to put Him to death. And we must beware of these people. These present-day Herods, burning with the same hatred for the divine Child, we must avoid, my dear ones, for they lie in wait for our faith. These Herods, so often dressed today in chasubles, Roman ones too, in mitres, desire to put to death the divine life in our souls.

Let us bear this in mind, my dear ones. Let us be on our guard. And having paid homage today to the divine Child, let us resolve firmly to keep our eyes wide open, to guard against those Herods who come to us today with a smile, an American smile, on their face.

Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.