

Daily Meditation 01/07/22

A Different “Revolution” Promised on Epiphany Day

Good morning.

I'm sharing with you in today's daily meditation, a poem that came my way on the eve of Epiphany, which was Wednesday evening, by my friend, a Mexican poet living in Berkeley, named Rafael Jesús González.

I think it's a wonderful poem and a wonderful summary of the story of the Magi, which is the story of Epiphany, which in turn is a story that ends the Christmas season, the 12 days of Christmas. And the last of these 12 days is the story of Magi.

Now, again, as we've talked about before, so many of the great feasts in Christianity are stories, they appeal to the imagination, primarily. And they're reminders that the writers of the Gospel, the way I would put it, were less historians than they were artists. They took some basic archetypes, if you will, that are unleashed by the Christmas story in this instance, and blow them up in wonderful ways and connect them to the Jewish tradition, to the Hebrew Bible, and the stories that are there.

Now, what I'd like to focus on today is the story of the star, the Magi who follow the star, because as we've written about recently in our daily meditations, to me, it is amazingly synchronistic, because it was not planned that 29 countries launched the Webb Telescope on Christmas Day.

And certainly the Webb Telescope can be seen as a manmade star in the sky, ten million-plus miles from Earth. There for what purpose? To find the origin of all the stars, to look back 13.8 billion years; Hubble was only able to look back 13.4 billion years. And tell us more and more about our origins. And by "our" I mean the origins of the universe, which is our home, and the earth, and the sun and the moon, which make our earth the way it is, and therefore, a hospitable home for human beings and all the other wonderful creatures we share the earth with. So I just think there's an amazing synchronicity.

This is what art does, it brings together disparate parts to tell a story that is meaningful. And it is these stories that people remember, much more than doctrines or dogmas or rules, or canon laws, or any such things. The stories are irrepressible, you might say, and I love how this poem ends, when he says,

*Finally the youngest of us murmured, / perhaps he brings revolution.
The other two kept in silence / the hope his saying awoke.*

So that the revolution we've been talking about in our daily meditations now for some time, is that of deconstructing patriarchy, as we know it, and deconstructing the versions of masculinity that are floating around and today have become so toxic. And yet so sticky, so adhesive, like Velcro, they're sticking to entire nations. Hungary has gone the way of authoritarianism; the Brazilian president has tried it. And a certain president, where we many of us live, tried it on January 6, and in preparation for January 6.

January 6 was not just one day, it started months before with lies about elections. And it's been continuing ever since with whole new laws now in many states, whose whole intention is to disempower voters, especially the poor and minorities, from being heard.

So let's just take a few minutes to reflect on -- and I'm drawing on Raymond Brown's book, *The Birth of the Messiah*. Raymond Brown is a Catholic scripture scholar. People would call him quite conservative, but I think when comes to these stories it's very interesting to see what he's put together here.

And what he's essentially saying is that the Magi following a star was not an unusual thing in the world of the early parts of this era. And of course, it's also bringing up the question of how, as we read in Numbers 24:17,

I see him though not now; I behold Him, though He is not near. A star will come forth from Jacob, and a sceptre arise from Israel.

Now, that's how Matthew puts the quotation from Numbers, but the original text reads like this:

I will point to him, though not now. I bless him, though he has not drawn near. A star will rise from Jacob, and a man will stand forth from Israel.

So it is a messianic text about an anointed king. The star symbolizes the Messiah, and it will rise from the east. And it's a symbol of light, of course, the star, but also of the Gentiles, because the Magi are not Christian or Jewish, they come from a faraway place, from the east. And there's just so much richness in this story.

And many generations of Christians, of course, have added to it. For example, they came up with the three names of the Magi. And they came up with ideas that the Magi were diverse races, that one of them was a black man from Africa. And that they all came to honor a king, with the gift of gold for a king, or for divinity. And the myrrh was a symbol of burial and sacrifice, therefore, the crucifixion story, the death of Jesus, and the incense was a symbol of divinity, and a gift that we give divinity.

So, all these stories are amazing to swim with in this 21st century and to add our own experiences, such as the launching of the Webb Telescope.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.