

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

As a young boy, I was often awakened by my now-long-sainted maternal Grandmother, Nellie McGivney, with the rather-less-than-energizing words, “Boy, get out of that bed! You’ll be a long time dead!” Ah, but don’t the Irish have a way of expressing themselves.

Perhaps that is why I choose when I’ve had the opportunity to awaken anyone, and I especially love to awaken the young this way, I generally sing very loudly, in my somewhat off-key melodious voice: “Rise, Shine, Give God the Glory...”, and I continue until the person or persons get up just to shut me up.

In fact, in one of my former lives, I ran a half-way house for ex-offenders and developed a jobs program to help them find work. However, quite a few had difficulty adjusting to the work-a-day world and I would often find myself trudging up the dark stairwells of the Raymond Rosen Housing Project or banging on the door of a house on a little side street in North Philly, singing at the top of my lungs. “Rise, Shine, Give God the Glory...” I would only have to do that a couple of times before the neighbors in the building or on the block would warn the sleepy head, he’d better get up and go to work before “the glory man” came around or he’d have big trouble.

The song, as you heard, was inspired by this passage from the prophecy of Isaiah which we heard today in our first reading. Now, Isaiah wasn’t trying to awaken God’s people from slumber. Rather he was trying to encourage them during their time of exile in enslavement in Babylon that the glory of the Lord their God still shines on them if they but remain faithful to him. In this time of defeat and destruction when they had little hope that their children would even live to adulthood that their sons will come back to them and their daughters would be carried to them in the arms of their nurses.

This promise that the Lord will not only never abandon them, but that his glory will shine through them so that “nations shall walk by their light and kings by their shining radiance” is indeed fulfilled in this feast of the Epiphany, when we celebrate the revelation of God-enfleshed to the world in the persons of the Magi who come to do Him homage.

These Magi or Kings or Astronomers or Wise Men represent us as St. Paul suggests in our second reading today from Ephesians. He tells us that this revelation of God was not made known to people in other generations, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: That the Gentiles (that would be us) are coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise of Christ Jesus through the Gospel.

So, accepting the proposition that the Magi in fact represent us, for a moment, as we begin this New Years, let's put ourselves in their position. For instance, how far have you come in seeking Christ in your life? Is your relationship with Him the central quest of your life or have you gone astray, following other stars? When you behold Him, as you surely do every time you participate in the Eucharist, do you truly do Him homage in awe and wonder, or are you looking at your watch worrying about moving on to the next thing on your schedule? In bringing gifts before the altar do you offer that which is most precious of your time and talent and treasure, as the Magi offered their most precious gifts to him, or do you give Him what is left over?

Today, in the wisdom of the Church, marks not just the Feast of the Epiphany, but the beginning the season of Epiphany, the time between Christmas and the beginning of Lent, when we enter more fully into the Pascal Mystery of the Lord's suffering, death, and resurrection. This is the time to reflect on how the Lord has manifested Himself in your life in the past year, consider the blessings He has given, and what you are to do with them. So, it is also a time to develop ministry in his service. What will you do with the far greater gift that the Lord has given you, the gift of His Very Own Life Within You.

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Darkness covers the earth, here and now, just as surely as it did in the time of Isaiah...the darkness of war, sectarian violence, terrorism, racism, and economic inequality that's leading the world into economic and social chaos. Thick clouds cover the people as well. Thick clouds of greed and fear; moral relativism and secular humanism that make right and wrong indistinguishable so much so that we, as a society, no longer know how to define marriage.

It's time to wake up, Church. We'll be a long time dead. Or in the words of Isaiah, "Rise up in splendor, Church! Your light has come, the glory of the Lord shines upon you... Nations shall walk by your light, and kings by your shining radiance. Raise your eyes and look about; they all gather and come to you.

Our hearts should be throbbing and overflowing with the light of Christ that's shining in us. Our Catholic faith is what the world needs now. It's what the world is aching for. In other words, it's time to wake up.

In the Christmas gift I recently gave you, Scott and Kimberly Hahn's book, *ROME SWEET HOME, Our Journey to Catholicism*, Dr. Hahn says, "Because we do have Christ's Real Presence in the Holy Eucharist, then we—even more than Protestants—have something to sing about, to preach about and to celebrate together." Then, he goes on, "I have always wondered why so many Catholics never delve more deeply into the mysteries of their Faith. It has always amazed me to discover how each and every mystery is grounded in Scripture,

centered on Christ and somehow preserved and proclaimed in the liturgy of the Church, the covenant family of God.”

Church, it is the same Jesus that we receive in the Eucharist, Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity, to whom the Magi came to do homage 2,000 years ago. His light shines in us to remove the darkness from the earth. It is His truth that we proclaim in the Church that alone will break open the clouds of doubt and despair that covers the peoples.

As the story of the Magi ends, we are told that they departed by another way. We too must continue our journey, but are being called to return home to God by another way. That’s what this time of Epiphany is all about. It’s time to awaken! It’s time to “delve more deeply into the mysteries of our Faith”, as Scott Hahn suggests, “to discover how each and every mystery is grounded in Scripture, centered on Christ, and preserved and proclaimed in the liturgy of the Church, the covenant family of God.” It’s time to go forth into the world by the way in which the Lord will lead us! It’s time to RISE, SHINE, GIVE GOD THE GLORY...