

Reflections Project: A letter to your younger self

Catholic Health Association of Manitoba

Legacy of Care and Compassion Project

January 12, 2015

Dear Mary,

The journey of the Magi reminds me of my own life journey. The Epiphany story which we celebrate on Jan. 1 is one that resonates in my life.

The image of light and the star is vivid and meaningful. The Magi were astrologers who studied the position of celestial bodies and tried to interpret their influence on human affairs. The star seems to have guided them in the early part of their journey but when it disappeared from sight, they were forced to stop and inquire the way. How happy they must felt when Herod directed them on the right path!

My own life has been a search for that right path. I thank all the people in my life who have helped me in the search. I was often inspired by the innocence and candour of the children in my classroom. The love and friendship of the sisters who shared my life and my struggles shed light on my path and to them I owe a debt of gratitude.

The star the Magi saw then reappears and leads them to the place where the Child was. Matthew tells us that “they were overwhelmed with joy.” Having discovered the One for whom they searched, they knelt before him and paid him homage, offering him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Like the Magi, we too have encountered “stars” in our lives. We find them among our family, our friends and our co-workers. Sometimes these “stars” were complete strangers who appeared to us in times of difficulty. By their kindness and compassion they dispelled the doubt and darkness we experienced and gave us new hope to face the future. At times we have been “stars” to other people. By God’s grace we were able to reach out to others and show them the hidden

yet real presence of God in their lives. It is in prayer and meditation that we receive the wisdom and strength to be light to others.

As the star symbolizes light and brightness, Herod symbolizes darkness and destruction. This ruler was deeply frightened and troubled by his encounter with the Magi. Herod's fear springs from envy and insecurity.

Fear is a force which affects all of us from time to time. If we are fearful we often want to be in control of people and affairs around us. Much of what is good in our daily lives never sees the light of day because it remains shrouded in the darkness of fear. Fear makes us afraid to reach out to others and to be brave enough to be ourselves. We are afraid to stand up and be counted even for the things that are dear to us. The fearful among us have to believe that God loves us, just as we are, and that he has called us out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Led by the light of a star, the Magi set out on a pilgrimage to worship the New Born King. They left their safe and comfortable surroundings and set out on a hazardous trip. It was hope that sustained them on their long journey. It was hope that convinced them that they would eventually find the One for whom they were searching. We can understand the uneasiness they must have felt as they travelled by night guided only by a tiny point of light in the dark sky. They had no direction whatever when they lost sight of the star. But they continued their pilgrimage by day until they reached Herod's palace.

There are people today who may not go to Church regularly, but many of them have a religious hunger. An expression of that hunger is manifested by going on a pilgrimage. Planes are filled with people travelling in search of something greater than themselves. Lourdes, Fatima, Knock, Santiago de Compostela and other places attract thousands of pilgrims each year. The story of the Magi reminds us that all who embark on the journey of life with faith and trust will become who they are meant to be and will one day encounter God the Incarnate One.

Just as the Magi came bearing gifts, may we gift one another with the gold of charity, the myrrh of kindness and the incense of praise! But it is only when the star in the sky is gone and the Magi have returned home that the work of Christmas begins for us:

to find the lost

to heal the broken
to feed the hungry
to release the prisoner
and to bring peace to those around us.

This Epiphany story speaks to me today, Mary, and I identify with the Magi as they followed the star.

Sincerely,

Sister Mary Sibbald, CSJ
Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto

P.S. I taught in St. Alphonus School, East Kildonan, Manitoba, for four years in the 70s. I dedicate this letter to a wonderful person, Alice Kotowich, who was one of the “stars” in my life when I lived in Winnipeg.