

**Epiphany Homily 2012**  
**“Following the Star”**  
**Thursday, January 5, 2012**  
**The Rev. Peter Faass, Rector**

For the past two years I have been praying with a daily online Advent Devotional called Following the Star. I enjoy this devotional for a number of reasons: there is wonderful instrumental music that accompanies the meditation, the reflections are thoughtful and thought-provoking, and it doesn't take too much time to pray through it each day. This last one is especially important to me in a season when on most days I feel as if I am barely hanging on by a thread to accomplish everything I need to do. But what I find most attractive about Following the Star is the graphic on this website, which is a star set against a dark purple/blue sky, that moves a little more to the East with each click of the page through the meditation. Following that star are three colorful, abstract figures of kings who follow it.

The progressive movement of the star with the Magi following for me symbolizes our own movement and journey in life.

This year the description on the opening page for Following the Star read as follows:

“There are no donkeys for us to ride, no camels to take us through the desert. We are left mostly to walk through our days, dependent on our own two feet.

And the presence of the God who has come.

Travel well into the quiet of time given to God. Watch the horizon for a glimpse of God's face.”

If anything the story of Christmas and Epiphany reminds us that the Christian faith is about the spiritual journey we are on to get a glimpse of God's face. The term Epiphany means manifestation in Greek. Glimpses of God's face are manifest repeatedly in this story. And they are manifest to not unlike you and people like you and me. So each glimpse is meant to be an object lesson on how God's face is manifest to us in our journeys as well.

Mary, the God-bearer, was on a journey as the humble servant of the Lord to bring a son into the world who would be the Savior and Redeemer of the human race. In her humility and willingness to undergo ridicule and public disgrace to fulfill God's call, we glimpse the face of God.

Joseph was on a journey as well; a journey that placed righteousness and compassion for

another human being in dire needs over the requirements of the law and his own honor. In him we glimpse the face of God.

In the shepherds – despised as the lowest of the low and the poorest of the poor – we get a glimpse of God's face as they are selected as the first to hear of Messiah's birth and who then in joy and gratitude rush off to see that which had been told them by the angelic choirs.

The Magi were on quite a literal journey, taking two years to follow the star to the place of Jesus' birth. But their journey was spiritual as well, because as Gentiles –people who were outsiders - they were thrilled to also be included in God's plan of salvation for the world as proclaimed in the good news of Jesus. In the Magi's faces of gratitude we also get a glimpse of the face of God.

The devout and righteous Simeon who prayed in the Temple without ceasing was given the blessing of seeing the Lord's salvation in Jesus. As he held that baby and blessed him we can see in his tender face a glimpse of God's face.

All of these people were called to watch the horizon, to see the star in all the unique ways that God manifests it to us, and to follow in faith the path that led them to the presence of the God who has come.

Epiphany calls to follow that star as well as we seek the face of God on our own journey.

There is a film playing at the Cedar-Lee called *The Way*.

*The Way* is a 2010 American film. It is a collaboration between Martin Sheen and his real life son Emilio Estevez, to honor the Camino de Santiago – the pilgrim's path of St. James the Apostle that begins in France and winds its way through Spain to the cathedral in Santiago de Compostela where the saint is interred.

Martin Sheen plays a bourgeoisie American doctor named Tom whose son – played by Estevez - is accidentally killed in the Pyrenees during a surprise storm, as he makes the Camino pilgrimage. Tom goes to France to retrieve the body of his son, but he has an epiphany and decides to complete the journey his son initially set out on. Sheen's decision is to walk the same ancient spiritual trail where his son died is a homage to his son.

Tom is a broken man whose life has little meaning. And he realizes that while he loved his son he did not understand him. While walking *The Camino*, Tom meets others from around the world, all broken people and all looking for greater meaning in their lives. He reluctantly falls in with three other pilgrims in particular. Joost is a large overweight

Dutchman from Amsterdam who says he is walking the route to lose weight to get ready for his brother's wedding and so that his wife will desire him again. But the reality is that we can see in Joost's eyes that his wife probably doesn't love him regardless of his weight. He is a warm, extrovert who is the first to start walking with Tom and is marked by an unfailing kindness to all he meets. Sarah is a Canadian divorcee who has fled an abusive marriage and the resulting loss of a child through abortion who says she is walking the pilgrimage to quit smoking. She is the second to join Tom and belittles him as a defense mechanism. "Jack from Ireland" is a travel writer from Ireland who when younger had desires to be the next Yeats or Joyce but grew accustomed to the lucrative field of travel writing. He is the last to join the quartet and has been suffering from writer's block.

The pilgrims travel through the breathtaking scenery of the Camino. They continually meet kindness in others, sometimes in surprising instances from unexpected sources including a hotel keeper and Spanish Gypsies.

Tom and the others all have moments of crisis and catharsis that make them drop their masks and really befriend each other. Through the pilgrimage, Tom discovers the meaning of one of the last things his son said to his father before he left on his journey: that there is a difference between "the life we live and the life we choose." The others find the same at the end of their journey. By the end of the trip, the four have come to find love, charity, and Christian community within themselves and each other. In other words they have glimpsed the face of God on their journey in those they met and in one another.

The Way is truly a film about how God calls us forward in our journeys to follow his star regardless of who we are or what state our lives are in.

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And the presence of the God who has come.

May we too follow the star however it is manifest to us and by so doing see the face of God.

Amen.