

EPIPHANY, Years ABC

“NEW YEAR’S RESOLUTIONS”

The culture of our day places a great deal of emphasis on the celebration of *The Nativity of the Lord*, December 25, but far less emphasis on the *Epiphany of the Lord*, which we celebrate today.

Today’s celebration of the Epiphany, or *manifestation*, of the Lord marks a combined celebration with three emphases: the adoration of Jesus by the wise men (Magi) from the east, the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan, and the wedding feast at Cana in Galilee.ⁱ

These three manifestations of the divinity of our Lord are included in the antiphon for the Cantic of Mary for this evening:

“Three mysteries mark this holy day: today the star leads the Magi to the infant Christ; today water is changed into wine for the wedding feast; today Christ wills to be baptized by John in the river Jordan to bring us salvation.”ⁱⁱ

As we begin a new year, I thought I’d share a few words of advice which are based on the life and writings of Pope Francis.ⁱⁱⁱ

1. Don’t gossip. Francis has preached against gossip on at least six occasions. He says when we gossip, we “are doing what Judas did,” and “begin to tear the other person to pieces.”

“Every time we judge our brother in our hearts or worse when we speak badly of them with others, we are murdering Christians,” Francis says. “There is no such thing as innocent slander.”

2. Finish your meals. Nearly 870 million people suffer from chronic malnutrition. The Pope says:

“We should all remember... that throwing food away is like stealing from the tables of the poor, the hungry! I encourage everyone to reflect on the problem of thrown away and wasted food to identify ways and means that, by seriously addressing this issue, are a vehicle of solidarity and sharing with the needy.”

3. Make time for others. “If the Pope can find time to be kind to others, if he can pause to say thank you, if he can take a moment make someone feel appreciated, then so ... can we.”

4. Choose the ‘more humble’ purchase. Pope Francis warned against luxurious lives that seek “the joy of the world in the latest smartphone, the fastest car.” “Cars are necessary,” he says, “but take a more humble one. Think of how many children die of hunger and dedicate the savings to them.”

The Pope preaches against materialism. “Certainly, possessions, money, and power can give a momentary thrill, the illusion of being happy, but they end up possessing us and making us always want to have more, never satisfied. ‘Put on Christ’ in your life, place your trust in him, and you will never be disappointed!”

5. Meet the poor ‘in the flesh.’ Sure, we donate to charity. But this is not enough for Francis, who said:

“It is not enough to mediate this commitment through institutions, which obviously help because they have a multiplying effect...

They do not excuse us from our establishing personal contact with the needy. The sick must be cared for, even when we find them repulsive and repugnant.”

6. Stop judging others. In the same way he denounces gossip, Francis condemns prejudice. He says that we need to develop a culture of encounter: “We must meet one another doing good.”

7. Befriend those who disagree. What can we do to our worst critics? Pope Francis: “When leaders in various fields ask me for advice, my response is always the same: dialogue, dialogue, dialogue. It is the only way for individuals, families, and societies to grow, the only way for the life of peoples to progress, along with the culture of encounter, a culture in which all have something good to give and all can receive something good in return. Others always have something to give me, if we know how to approach them in a spirit of openness and without prejudice.”

8. Make commitments, such as marriage.

In a culture that promotes constant change, we need to honor commitment. Pope Francis spoke in a particular way about the commitment of marriage:

“Today, there are those who say that marriage is out of fashion; in a culture of relativism and the ephemeral, many preach the importance of ‘enjoying’ the moment. They say that it is not worth making a life-long commitment, making a definitive decision, ‘forever,’ because we do not know what tomorrow will bring.”

“I ask you, instead, to be revolutionaries, to swim against the tide; yes, I am asking you to rebel against this culture that sees everything as temporary and that ultimately believes that you are incapable of responsibility, that you are incapable of true love. I have confidence in you and I pray for you. Have the courage ‘to swim against the tide.’ Have the courage to be happy,” he says.

9. Make it a habit to ‘ask the Lord.’ Bothered about the future? Pray, the Pope urges us especially the youth.

10. Be happy. The true Christian, says the Pope, exudes great joy. He says keeping this joy to ourselves “will make us sick in the end.” So important is joy to him that his first apostolic exhortation, the first major document he wrote on his own, is titled "*Evangelii Gaudium*" (The Joy of the Gospel).

In a homily, Francis said: “Sometimes these melancholy Christians’ faces have more in common with pickled peppers than the joy of having a beautiful life.” “Joy is a pilgrim virtue. It is a gift that walks, walks on the path of life, that walks with Jesus.” “The Christian sings with joy, and walks, and carries this joy.”

May the Joy of the Gospel penetrate every aspect of our lives in Christ! May the Lord, who has been made manifest to all the nations in His Epiphany inspire us to manifest God’s love through our thoughts, words and actions. Amen.

ⁱ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 528

ⁱⁱ *Liturgy of the Hours*, Vol. I, p. 573

ⁱⁱⁱ ‘New Year’s Resolutions: the Francis List’, as found at http://www.rappler.com/move-ph/46933-new-year-resolutions-pope-francis-quotes?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=referral&utm_medium=share_bar