

Called to be Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh

The Scriptures today give us three beautiful symbols with which we can connect our lives to this feast of the Epiphany of the Lord: GOLD, FRANKINCENSE and MYRRH.

Gold is the gift of royalty. The Letter to the Ephesians reminds us again that all are heirs to the Reign of God. We have all freely been given this inheritance because God came among us as one of us in the person of the Christ, who gave his life for all. So we are in a real sense called to be the royal gold of the Gospel story.

Gold must be mined and refined; impurities must be removed and alloys added that will give it strength. Its brilliance has staying power if it is used. Universally held to be the most precious of all metals, gold is truly the symbol of royalty.

Our faith, too, must be mined and refined, purified and strengthened. Faith is not a gift that just sits there. Our faith must be active if it is to sustain its brilliance and be the symbol of our royal inheritance. Jesus' invitation to follow him demands that we be willing to be formed in his

image and to be his presence to the world. We are called to be gold.

Because the Christ also came to glorify God, we are called to be frankincense. Frankincense is a resin which when fired produces a visible sign in the form of smoke rising, as do our prayers rise to God. At the same time, it is an invisible sign which envelops us in its aromatic perfume, as does the Divine presence among us. In proper proportions incense enhances our worshipping environment and makes it special.

So our worship must also be a visible symbol of our praise rising to our God. A sacrament, we know, is an outward—visible—sign. We call our worship “liturgy,” which means “work of the people.” Merely being present at the Sunday Eucharist does not do justice to a people “*on fire with love for God.*” Clearly, our visible and active participation is required. When the full community participates, there is an experience, much like incense, that embraces the entire worshipping community with the sweet presence of the divine. And so we are called to be frankincense.

Because Jesus came to transform the world through his healing presence, we are also called to be myrrh. Myrrh is a spice or herb used

to heal, a balm that comforts, an ointment that takes away the sting of pain. It is the supreme irony of the Incarnation that the one who embraced our humanity did so to heal us, but in doing so willingly suffered the supreme sacrifice for the rest of humanity. The healing balm of Christ is passed on to each of us in the Eucharist as we become Christ's Body in our world to be his healing presence as we go about our lives. We are to heal the suffering in mind, body and spirit. We are to feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, welcome the stranger. As he healed; we are called to heal because we are his Body through our Communion in the Eucharist. We are called to be myrrh.

Christ's Epiphany challenges each of us not simply to possess faith and give that faith expression in divine worship, it also challenges us to witness that faith in our daily lives. As we celebrate the manifestation of Christ to the world, we recognize this feast as a symbol of what we are all about as individual Christians and as a community of faith. We have seen the star—the light that has come into the world—and we follow it, bearing the gifts of our very selves. In doing so, we accept the challenge to be a faithful people, a worshipping people, and a healing people. Called to be gold, frankincense and myrrh!