Vatican

Francis, the comic strip



Pope Francis uses incense as he celebrates Mass marking the feast of the Epiphany in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican Jan. 6. (CNS/Paul Haring)

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Vatican City — January 7, 2019
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People find Jesus only through humble love, and once they find him, they are called to offer him the gifts of their prayer, their adoration and their care of others, Pope Francis said.

Celebrating the feast of Epiphany Jan. 6, the pope said Christians are called to imitate the Magi: "They do not debate; they set out. They do not stop to look, but enter the house of Jesus. They do not put themselves at the center, but bow down before the one who is the center. They do not remain glued to their plans, but are prepared to take other routes."

And they each bring gifts, he said during his homily at Mass in St. Peter's Basilica. "In this Christmas season now drawing to its close, let us not miss the opportunity to offer a precious gift to our king," especially by caring for those who cannot repay the gift.

Reciting the Angelus after Mass, Pope Francis pleaded with European governments to demonstrate "concrete solidarity" with 32 migrants rescued from the Mediterranean Dec. 22 and 17 others rescued Dec. 29. The 49 people, including several children, are still on the rescue boats of the Germany-based Sea-Watch humanitarian organization; no European government has given the boats permission to dock and bring the migrants ashore.

In his Mass homily and in his main Angelus address, Pope Francis contrasted the attitude and actions of the Three Kings with the attitude of Herod, who was "greatly troubled" at news of the Messiah's birth. While the Wise Men set out to meet Jesus, Herod stayed in his palace, plotting ways to keep all his power.

Herod and the scribes, he said at the Angelus, "had hard hearts, which stubbornly refused to visit that baby. That is a possibility: closing oneself to the light. They represent those who, even in our day, are afraid of the coming of Jesus and close their hearts to their brothers and sisters in need."

The glory of God born in a stable is "is symbolized by the light, which penetrates and illumines all things," he said. But the surprising thing is that "God does not need the spotlights of the world to make himself known" or the assistance of the powerful, like Herod.

"We might think that it would have been better had the star of Jesus appeared in Rome, on the Palatine Hill, where Augustus ruled over the world; then the whole empire would immediately have become Christian," he said.

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"But God's light does not shine on those who shine with their own light. God 'proposes' himself; he does not 'impose' himself," the pope said. "He illumines; he does not blind."

Being flashy or powerful is always a temptation for people, he said. "How many times have we pursued the seductive lights of power and celebrity, convinced that we are rendering good service to the Gospel!"

"How many times, too, have we as a church attempted to shine with our own light," he said. "Yet we are not the sun of humanity. We are the moon that, despite its shadows, reflects the true light, which is the Lord. He is the light of the world. Him, not us."

Pope Francis also spoke about the gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh offered by the Magi to the baby Jesus.

"Gold, the most precious of metals, reminds us God has to be granted first place; he has to be worshiped," he said. Frankincense is a symbol of the prayer that each person is called to offer God. And myrrh, the same ointment that would later be used to anoint Jesus' dead body, is a sign of the gift of "care for bodies racked by suffering, the flesh of the vulnerable, of those left behind, of those who can only receive without being able to give anything material in return."