

Homily for Sunday, January 5, 2025 (Epiphany)

For the longest time I would get confused between the terms “astronomy” and “astrology.” I knew they both had to do with the stars, but after that the confusion



set in. *Astronomy* is the scientific study of space, the universe, the cosmos. It’s based on math and science, and it’s goal is to help explain phenomena. *Astrology*, on the other hand, is not a science, but a pseudoscience that tries to

explain human behavior based on the position of celestial bodies. It’s this latter one, astrology, that explains why all of you people are a little squirrely when there’s a full moon. Astrology gets into horoscopes and zodiac signs, and the belief that your fate in life is connected to a specific zodiac sign you were born under. Unlike astronomy, astrology is speculative at best.

In Biblical times, there was no developed science, no astronomy. But astrology, the reading of the stars and the prediction of human behavior was highly regarded, almost thought of as a science. The Wisemen were considered astrologers.

One way or another, astronomy (the science) and astrology (the belief system), both have to do with stars. When something good happens to us we tend to say, “the stars were aligned.” I think that expression says more about faith than it says

about a stroke of pure luck, or that the muses were cooperating with me. I really do believe that when I'm doing what God created me to do--when I'm putting God first in my life—the work I do is still work, but it comes with a certain ease and an inner peace. To put it another way: there's work that drains you, tires you out, and then there's work that, while it remains work, gives you energy. When you're aligned with God, the resources you thought you didn't have, all of a sudden manifest themselves. Saint Mother Teresa was a great believer in this. She often spoke about focusing on God's will, on serving the poorest of the poor, and trusted that somehow whatever she needed, eventually, would be provided. When the stars are aligned, it starts with God, it ends with God, and it's God all the way through.

We also have another word for the opposite—disaster. The prefix “dis” means “not” or “opposite”. So to be disconnected means not to be connected. To disapprove means not to approve. To disagree means not to agree. The word *aster* is the Latin word for star. (Maybe some of you grow asters, the flower. The bloom looks like a star). If aster means star, dis-aster means being disconnected from the stars. When something turns into a disaster, it's because we are not aligned with the stars, we're disconnected from the intention of the universe and the ways of God. We are not allowing a greater authority, a greater power to guide us.

The Wisemen's lives, although they were pagans, were much more aligned with God, with the stars, with the seeking of truth, than Herod's life. Herod's although he was a Jewish king was a disaster, a complete failure. When we pray open-ended prayers, an alignment happens. When we pray, convinced that we already

have the answer, and that God needs to get on board with that answer, that prayer usually ends in disaster. Instead of us aligning with God, we want God to align with us. It's the difference between an honest prayer and an arrogant prayer. One seeks the truth; the other seeks false security. One seeks righteousness; the other seeks self-righteousness. The Wisemen seek Truth and are willing to go anywhere and everywhere to find that Truth. They are on a mission, a journey to seek and find the Truth. Jesus has the utmost praise for anyone who seeks the truth. On one of the few occasions where he describes himself, he says, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." Contrast that to the chief priest who sits in the Temple and Herod who sits on his throne going nowhere. They are on no journey. They have all the answers and feel there is no need to seek any greater Truth than their own little truth. Reality must bend to them. Reality must come to the Temple and the royal palace and come under their terms. They are know-it-alls.

The Christian life is a journey deeper and deeper into the Truth. All truths, no matter where or who they come from, should lead us to the one truth, the person of Jesus. Here's a little story that remind me of the Wisemen, of people in the R.C.I.A. process, and of anyone who is seeking the truth with humility.

Once upon a time, a young monk was pondering many of life's questions. He found himself perplexed by a key one: "Why are some people faithful, and others are not?" Eager to discover the answer, he raced to his master-teacher, a wise elderly monk. The elderly monk responded to the question with a story: One day, a dog chased a rabbit. The rabbit ran fast and the dog, chasing after it, barked and barked. Soon the barking caught the attention of other dogs. So,

they too joined in the chase. What a noise they made! Eventually as the other dogs began to get tired, they fell off from the chase and went home. Finally, the only dog left was the first dog, still in pursuit of the rabbit. Up and down the roadways they ran until the rabbit eluded the chasing dog. Once the dog realized he could not catch the rabbit, he returned home, ever watchful for the next time and the next chase.

The young monk remained silent for a respectful period of time and then said to the elder monk, "I don't get it. What does that mean?" The elder monk smiled and said, "The first dog was the only dog to actually see the rabbit. Those who remain faithful must see the vision." With that, the younger monk went off to ponder his new learning.

The Wisemen get to see the Christ Child. They go home by another way and are forever changed. Herod, in his self-righteousness, never saw the Prince of Peace. The stars aligned for the Wisemen while Herod's life remained a disaster. Remain seekers of the Truth. When you get tired or frustrated, take a break, and be ever watchful for the next time and the next chase. What you eventually will find will be far better than all the gold, frankincense, and myrrh the world can offer. Truth will not be a thing unreachable. Truth will be a person, the person of Jesus, who was always in your midst.

~Fr. Phil